

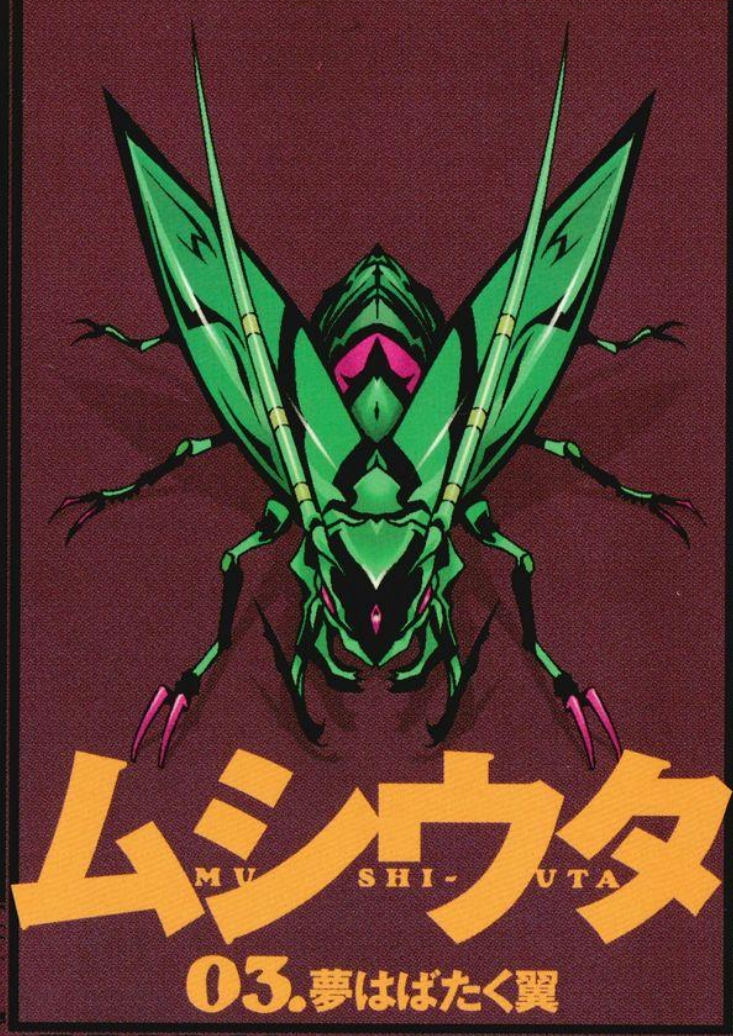


03. 夢ははたぐ翼
kyohei iwai
岩井 恭平

ムシタ

M U S H I T A

角川スニーカー文庫



岩井恭平

If I'm no longer a Mushitsuki,

Ubuki

then there will be nothing left of me.

Even the meaning of my existence

will disappear as well ---

Shiika

Yuu

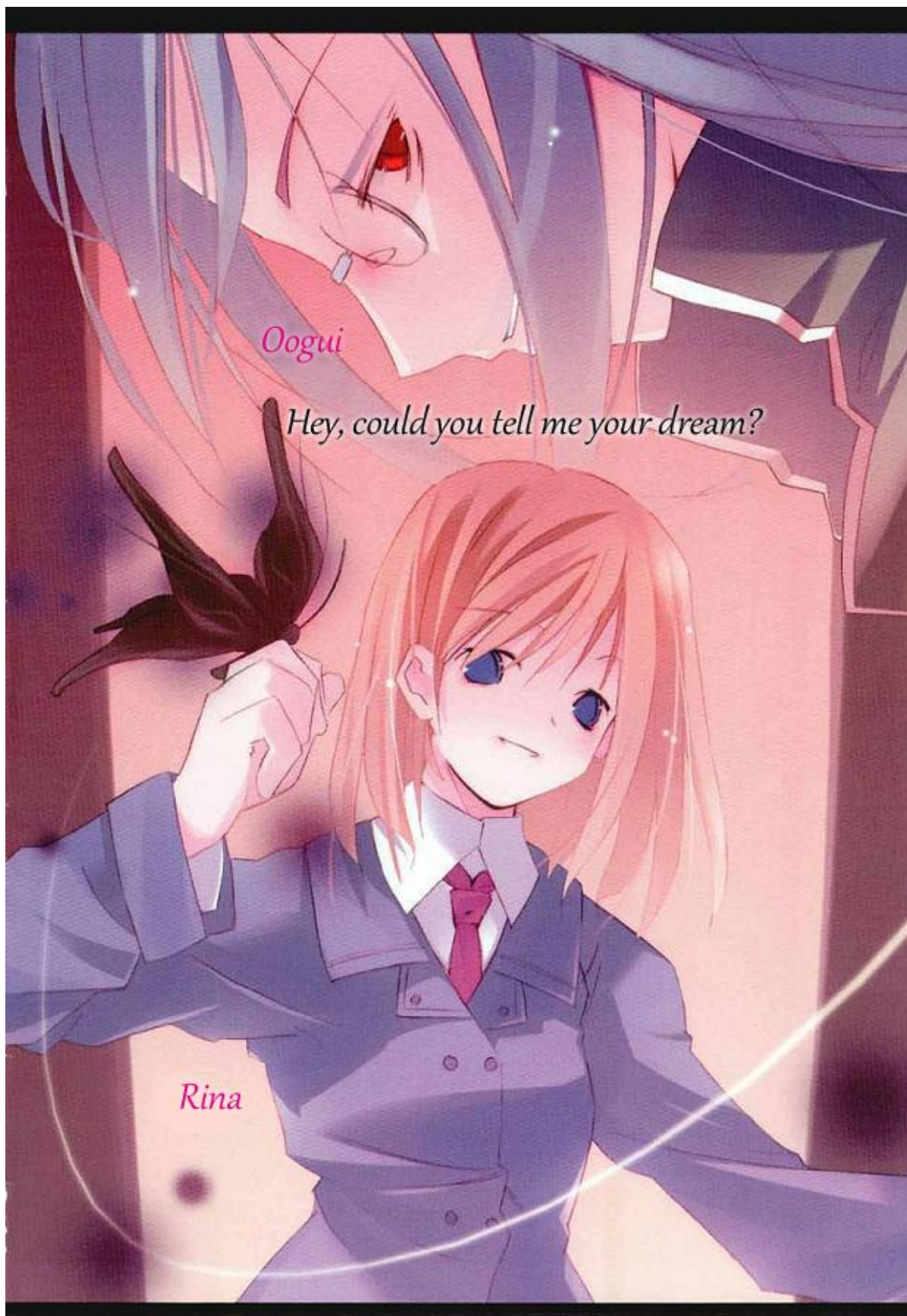
Yaeko

Kasuo

Kakkou

Touko





Oogui

Hey, could you tell me your dream?

Rina

立花利菜

Rina Tachibana

大助の同級生。虫憑きのレジスタンス組織“むしばね”のリーダー“レイディー・バード”として“かっこう”と激しく戦い、死亡。



緒方有夏月

Akatsuki Ogata



土師の妹の同級生であり、元むしばねメンバー。現在は東中央支部火種二号“月姫”として活動。利菜を殺したかっこうへの復讐を誓う。

大喰い

Oogui



虫憑きを生むといわれる三体の謎めいた存在——“始まりの三匹”の一人。四年前、幼い詩歌の夢を喰い、虫憑きにした。

Characters of MUSHI UTA

キャラクター紹介



薬屋大助

Daisuke Kusuriya

何一つ特徴的なところのない普通の少年だが、特別環境保全事務局＝特環が擁する最強の虫憑き“かっこう”としての顔をもつ。



杏本詩歌

Shiika Anmoto



その特異な能力から“ふゆほたる”と名づけられた虫憑き。大助と出会い、強く惹かれあう。現在、特環の隔離施設に収容されている。

土師圭吾

Keigo Hagi



特環の東中央支部長。“むしばね”との戦闘中に負傷し、昏睡中。現在、支部長代理を務める五郎丸柊子からは、高校時代から慕われている。



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ムシウタ

03. 夢はばたく翼

岩井恭平



角川文庫 13322

Ce Light Novel Translation

Terms in case you forgot:

SEPB's classification:

Kashu: Title given to Mushitsuki that had outstanding ability in combat. Almost all of the currently existing Mushitsuki belong to this category.

Ishu: Title given to Mushitsuki that had some sort of special ability.

Hishu: Title given to Mushitsuki that had all sort of unique condition. This title is one of the rarest, not that many was given such title in the whole series. So far Shiika is the only one that had obtained this title. (Because she's the only one that awakened from Fallen status.)

(Mushi) Types:

Minion Type: Also known as separation type whereas the Mushi would be separated from the host themselves. This is the most populated type of all, near 80% (estimated) of Mushitsuki population had this type.

Special Type: Every Mushi of this type have no physical shape of itself, but might form one when it activates its ability which would mostly likely be control of certain medium within its territory. IE: Fire, electricity, gravity, etc.

Fusion Type: The rarest type of all. The Mushi of this type would fuse itself with Mushitsuki's body + weapon to activate its ability and further grant super human strength, speed, and durability to its host.

Enjoy ~

P.S If you know any translator that would like to help out with future volumes, either Jap or Chi is fine, just email me at Mushiutateam@hotmail.com and I'll get back to you.

Also, join the Mushi-Uta facebook fan page!

We'll be posting releases and other Mushi-Uta related stuffs there =D

-Wing

Prologue

A teenage girl crash landed on a cliff.

“...Ah!”

Her back collided fiercely against a tree; the sudden intense pain caused the teenage girl to stop breathing for an instant. However, the teenage girl ignored the pain, got up quickly, and began to crawl toward the edge of the cliff.

“Ahh... Ahhhh.....”

A groan that was different from her usual tone squeezed out from the deepest part of her throat. Just when she was about to shield her eyes with her hands, tears fell onto her stiffened hands.

The bright red light was reflecting the strange appearance of the teenage girl.

Two lens-like objects were covering the teenage girl's face --- objects that could make one feel reminiscent of an insect's compound eyes. The objects extended all the way past her neck, connecting to the two pairs of black wings on her back.

All of a sudden, the compound eyes and wings became tentacles and de-fused from her body, revealing the immature face of a girl who had just turned thirteen last month. After that, the tentacles deformed into a black-colored little creature with two pairs of wings and two pairs of legs --- very similar to a dragonfly.

“Ahhhhhh....”

She couldn't bring herself to accept or reject the scene happening in front of her, and just merely cried in despair. On the necklace that she was wearing, a gold-colored ring was swaying.

--- The island, that she was raised on, was burning.

Countless flames emerged all over the little town that could be seen from the cliff. Not only the little town, but also numerous ships that were parked near the harbor, were being devoured by the crimson flames. The only places that were excluded from this savagery were the seas surrounding this island, and the cliff where the teenage girl was situated.

Crimson flames sprang endlessly from the town; its fierce burning blaze seemed just like a giant monster in the teenage girl's eyes.

And that monster had a pair of uneven sharp tusks, just like a demon.

The teenage girl widened her eyes, and quietly gazed at the view in front of her.

I won't forget ---

She continued to gaze at the flames with a doll-like emotionless expression as she clenched tightly onto her necklace.

I won't forget... .. Everyone's voices, pain, and their last expressions --- I will never forget

Just then, a presence came from behind the teenage girl.

"I finally found you... My lovely child."

It was a young female's voice. Right after she spoke, voices from other people interrupted.

"Reporting to vice director, there isn't a single trace of (Sanbikime)." [T/N: Sanbikime = The third one (Nick name for the last original)]

"Miguruma-kun, you actually destroyed the whole island... isn't that a bit too much?"

Upon hearing that, the teenage girl who had her eyes still wide open finally understood the identities of the people behind her.

These people... It's all their fault that (Sensei) and everyone ---

She clenched her fist tightly on the ground, before turning her head around.

Just at that instant, her whole body trembled in surprise.

A beautiful, tall, and slender woman wearing a white suit; was shedding tears while facing her from a short distance.

"I'm sorry..."

The woman moved her lips as she closed up onto the teenager to where they could almost touch each other. The mole beneath her slender eyes was wet from the transparent tears. The voice that sounded through those rosy lips was filled with kindness and love.

"The things that we have done are presumably cruel and sad..."

The foreheads of the teenage girl and the woman finally came in contact.

The teenage girl was confused.

The woman that suddenly appeared and hugged her while crying --- Is this person, who is currently embracing her gently, really the culprit that destroyed her hometown?

Just then, the teenage girl's doubt was instantly shattered without leaving a trace.

"But....."

While their foreheads touched against one another, the woman's eyes gazed straight at the teenage girl.

"You will forgive me right? Since I love you this much..."

The teenage girl gasped.

The woman was still smiling as she continued to look at her with her slender eyes.

"You will also... love me right?"

Although it was a smile filled with gentleness and love, the teenage girl couldn't stop her body from shivering from this fear that she seemed to have experienced before. She continued to quiver nonstop as if she had fallen ill.

She cursed herself for having such an illusion. After the disappearance of the comfort that she felt momentarily, the teenage girl firmly believed ---

This woman was the enemy.

And not just any enemy, she's the most terrifying and unimaginable enemy that she had ever encountered before.

So scary ---

The teenage girl was terrified to a point where she couldn't even bring herself to feel hatred or sadness.

(Sensei), help me --

"How pitiful, there's no need for you to be this afraid ..."

The woman hugged the teenage girl as she said that:

“Head director, you are going to undertake the entire responsibility of this mission.”

“H-Huh... What do you mean by that?!”

“Rest assured; the candidate to succeed you has already been chosen. If we leave everything to him, the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau will definitely be fine

The voice of the woman speaking blew into her ears.

“From now on... you don’t have to be afraid anymore. Pitiful children like you, as well as every single Mushitsuki out there, will be loved by us...”

On the cliff that was brightened by the red light, aside from trembling — there was nothing else that the teenage girl could do.....

1.00

Yuu Part 1

After walking out from the entrance of the cram school, the sky had already turned dark.

Even worse, it was also raining very heavily.

Next to the cram school, there were many signboards, covered with large light bulbs, on the ground. Because the switches were activated, the neon lights suddenly turned on.

I've been thinking about it for a long time now; but why is it that the store next to the cram school is one of those from the..P-pervverted... industry?... Wouldn't it have a negative influence on the moral education of the students here?...

A man, standing still in front of the store holding his umbrella, squinted his eyes because of the flashing neon lights. He lightly knocked the edge of the signboard with his fingertip, before shifting his gaze to the teenage girl. She hurriedly averted her gaze, and put up an indifferent expression.

One by one, students holding their umbrellas walked past the teenage girl who was standing dazedly.

The sound of the rain, the sound of students bidding farewell to each other, and the sound of puddles being stepped on by the passersby; those sounds rang in front of the teenage girl who was displaying an indifferent attitude.

She took out a foldable phone from her pocket and turned its power on. Displayed on the LCD screen were the time, 8:54 P.M., as well as the icon for a good signal. Below the LCD screen was a group photo that she took with her friends at the theme park.

The teenage girl is Ebina Yuu; a fourteen-year-old sophomore from junior high that is set to advance to her junior year in two months' time. Because of her plain outfit and her dull glasses, it made her appearance seem rather ordinary. Yuu remembered how her classmate Chie often nagged her, and said things such as "Want me to lend you some clothes?" or "Want me to introduce you to a good beauty salon?"

"Yuu, wait up! Didn't we promise to go home together?"

Yuu turned around, facing the direction where the sound came from. Two teenage girls were closing in on her with slightly angry expressions.

“The direction is obviously different, why must we go home together?”

Yuu slightly sighed. This caused her two friends to exchange gazes with each other before saying:

“Didn’t we say that we’re going to buy the materials together, for the event the day after tomorrow?”

“That’s right; it will be too late if we go tomorrow!”

“The day after tomorrow?”

Upon hearing their remarks, Yuu then recalled.

The day after tomorrow was February 14, which was Valentine’s Day. They seemed to be planning on making some home-made chocolates. However, this kind of activity was pretty much meaningless to Yuu, who didn’t have anyone on her mind.

“I’m not interested in that kind of --- Uuu...”

The instant when her two friends walked closer, Yuu frowned.

Even though they were all the same age, and Yuu was even older than them by at least three months, she was shorter than both of them.

“D-Don’t get so close to me! Both of you immediately take a step back!”

“Seriously Yuu, are you still concerned about your height? It’s no use, you should give up already!”

“My growth stage has yet to come, that’s all! W-Wait... Why are you guys always surrounding me like this?!”

“Aha, amazing! So this is what those ‘alien captured’ scenes look like!”

“I am an earthling with a Japanese nationality okay?!”

Yuu, who was held up by both of them, was struggling with her hands and feet in panic.

“That pride of yours and stubbornness to never give up, are seriously national-class huh?”

“Don’t pat someone’s head while saying such things!”

“Ah, sorry... we will help you do tomorrow’s homework, so forgive us okay?”

“It’s okay, I’ll do it myself.”

Right after she spoke, Yuu realized something was wrong. “Do it myself”; this kind of phrase would probably make one sound childish. Just as she expected, she heard the giggling of her friends behind her. Her already unhappy face became even worse. [T/N: The Raw for “Do it myself” part is 自分でやるもん (Jibun de yaru mon). It is indeed in fact kind of childish, probably only kids or “dere” type say it like that.]

“Ahaha... Oh right, what were you staring at your phone before for? Not planning on going home?”

“I forgot to bring an umbrella...”

“I see, so that’s why you were planning on calling home so they can come and pick you up?”

“Mhm---”

Yuu lowered her head and took a glance at her cell phone, and said with a humming sound.

“But I feel there is no need to call my family to pick me up just because of this... and so I’m thinking about other methods...”

“Why not think of borrowing an umbrella from us, or having us walk you home?”

“Our directions are different; it would be too troublesome ...”

“That “Don’t want to rely on others” habit of yours is also one of your characteristics!”

“Hey... Aren't we worthy of even the slightest amount of trust?”

“T-That’s not it...!”

After seeing Yuu who was in a panic trying to deny the idea, the teenage girls smirked.

“Becoming cheerful so quickly is also one of Yuu’s good points. Weren’t you very angry just a second ago?”

Yuu suddenly realized what had just happened, and turned around, facing them with her back. Her friends’ giggling came from behind her once again.

“Sorry... Sorry... We apologize for the teasing, don’t be angry, okay?”

“Also, let us copy tomorrow’s homework from you as well!”

“So in the end, I’m the one who’s gonna do it anyway... Well, that’s fine...”

“Because Yuu, you’re the only one that writes the most perfect homework in our whole class! Say, which high school are you planning to go to after working this hard?”

“Uhm... that... East...”

“Eh? Which one?”

“Ouka East...”

“Ha?”

Her friends were surprised by her respond.

“Isn’t Ouka East High School that super average of the average --- high school? Although it’s a college focused high school...”

“I remember Yuu’s score was much better than that school’s requirement? For what reason did you study that desperately for then?”

Facing their questioning, Yuu’s voice was getting lighter and lighter.....

“If I didn't study, I'd have felt uneasy...”

“There’s no way you would fail those requirements though.”

“I just don’t like that feeling of uneasiness!”

Yuu replied with a serious tone.

The two of them completely didn’t understand how hard it was to live an ordinary life in this era. If one were to make one careless mistake and picked the wrong direction to walk in life, they would easily become failures. What should she do, if she were to fail her Junior High graduating exams or if she were to pick the wrong aspiration to follow and lose her education because of it? Even if she made it the next year, there wouldn’t been any same age students in her class. That means she would have to go through three years without making any friends. And even worse, what if she failed her college exams as well? She probably couldn’t bring herself to see her family anymore.

After bidding their farewells, her two friends went home. And before they left, they asked again:

“You really don’t want us to send you home?”

However, Yuu still rejected their offer. Before they finally left, the two of them were showing lonely expressions.

“Well now ---“

Gazing at the rain that was getting heavier and heavier, Yuu began to ponder.

This rain was preventing her from going home. If there were an umbrella, or a car that came to pick her up, then the problem would be solved. However, Yuu rejected both methods.

Now then, there were only two options left... The first option was to wait there until the rain stopped... or the second option— to rush home in the middle of this heavy rain.

“Okay---!”

Yuu filled herself with vigor as she hugged the book bag that was on her shoulder just a second ago. As for her body and clothes, it would be fine if she just let them dry later on, but it would be bad if her textbooks were to get wet from the rain.

The instant she charged into the streets, cold droplets of rain splashed against her cheeks. The lens on her glasses instantly became wet as well.

Her goal was the next corner, a building that was near the intersection. As long as she could get there, there would be an eave for her to shelter herself from the rain.

When I get home, mom is definitely gonna scold me... isn't she?

Yuu ran while thinking about that.

After she got home, her mom would probably be angry about seeing Yuu soaking wet from head to toe and yell: “Why didn’t you call me to pick you up?!”

Even her friends from earlier would laugh at her for being a dummy, wouldn't they? The fact that she ended up like a drowned rat... they would probably laugh at her for being so stubborn, and tell her to rely on them more often— or perhaps they'd just show those lonely expressions once again.

Ah whatever, I fulfilled my goal of “getting back home” so who cares!

Actually, Yuu had felt extremely irritated from the beginning. This was because she got a much lower score than she expected on her practice exams today. In addition, she had mistaken the payment date of the cram school tuition fee, hence she had to carry money on her— and then, the sudden torrential downpour occurred as well.

To think— Yuu, who was someone who always meticulously prepared everything ahead of time, and who even worried that she might have over done things; was making these kinds of mistakes... Her luck today was seriously awful. Today's Yuu totally didn't behave like her usual self. During days like these; it would be best for her to get home early and study for the next day's lecture.

She was almost there, at her designated building. As long as she got there, she would be able to see the bus stop. And before the bus came, she could stay at that spot and take shelter from the rain.

Just when Yuu was done thinking about that, and planned to make her final charge.

“.....”

With a splash, Yuu suddenly came to halt in the puddles.

Her whole figure stood at the spot quietly.

She could feel her heart beating violently against her chest from within.

Supposedly, because of the lack of oxygen from running at full speed, it caused her breathing to stop at that instant. She could also hear the stepping sounds of passersby around her rather clearly...

No, I didn't see it... I didn't see anything at all ---!

Yuu tried desperately to make herself believe that.

But it was no use.

The more she thought about it, the clearer the scene that she caught a glimpse of became in her mind.

It was located in the dark alley between the two high-rising buildings where the streetlights barely reached.

It was there that Yuu saw something similar to human foot.

Her heartbeat began to beat even faster.

B-But, that's just something that seems like a foot... It's not clear... whether or not it's actually a foot...

And besides, it wasn't moving at all...

The sudden conclusion that came to mind sent chills down her spine.

She withdrew her former statement. Just because it was simply not moving doesn't exclude the possibility of it being human foot. Perhaps, there might be some reason that caused it to not move...

For example, death ---

The conclusion that she finally arrived at, was immediately rejected by herself once again.

No, I still haven't confirmed whether it was human foot or not..... in case of a mistake, it will cause others troubles. They might even publish it on the newspaper, saying stuffs like a riot caused by a junior high student's report... I-If it really became like that, I would never be able to bring myself to go to school anymore!

Aside from Yuu, the passersby didn't seem to have noticed this.

Within her head --- an option of asking someone to confirm the situation with her appeared. However, Yuu immediately dispelled this idea as well; there was a possibility that she was just seeing things. She then thought about it for a bit, she herself who was acting indecisive like a fool, couldn't possibly find anyone to help her.

There was a chance that it might be human, but it might not be as well.

Bad feelings filled Yuu's heart.

And this was the feeling Yuu disliked the most --- Uneasiness. Once she entered this condition, she would feel restless, and would want to break free from this uneasy condition as soon as possible to return to her normal self.

"It was not human, it was not human. Mhm, that thing definitely wasn't a human"

And so the best course of action she concluded— pretend that she was just seeing things.

B-But... what if that was really a human ---

And what if it's someone who's sick or injured, and is in urgent need of help? Is it a he or a she? And there might be a chance that they possibly could die because of this. Even if I go home like this, there's no way I can get rid of this uneasiness. Not only that, but this uneasiness might become more severe.

To the current Yuu, in order to erase her uneasiness, there was only one option left.

Yuu turned her body, and began to walk into the dark alley.

In order to perform the last method ---“Confirm through bare eyes”

“It was not human, it was not human.....”

She lowered her head to carefully follow the road, step by step walking into the pitch-black alley while hugging her book bag tightly. The only thing she could see were her feet, and gravel road one meter ahead.

The light of the street lamps and footsteps of passersby were gradually fading away.

B-because it was only a little glimpse of it, and it was just an instant! How am I supposed to tell whether that was a human's foot or not!? It could be some kind of cloth or something similar right? And then I can be rest assured and go home that way... Oh right, I have to email Chie when I get home. And then do those preview and practice homework, as well as the homework that I'm gonna turn in tomorrow ---

Yuu suddenly stopped walking.

The heartbeat that was just rioting a second ago had become quiet. From the mouth that was half opened, words seemed to have stuck and couldn't come out.

In front of Yuu's feet, were two feet lying on the ground.

Her body began to tremble as her eyes betrayed her will of not wanting to look, and swayed straight toward the direction of the owner of those feet.

An unfamiliar teenage boy was lying in front of her. His back was leaning against a stone stairway that had only five steps, and his pale face was exposed to the heavy rain.

The teenage boy's eyes were slightly opened, but he was not moving at all. The thin layer of white clothes that he was wearing seemed very similar to those that hospital patients wear.

Yuu instantly thought that the teenage boy was already dead. And just when she was about to scream out loud, a sudden sound of something dropping onto the ground interrupted her.

Next to the bare-footed teenage boy, a case-like object dropped onto the ground. It was a transparent thin case that was the same size as Yuu's palm, and there was a round CD disk within.

“.....!”

Just then, Yuu sounded a weak grasp.

She noticed that there was a tiny centipede crawling on the teenage boy's abdomen. And that centipede was spewing green bodily fluids as it twitched in pain. It was probably injured right? However, in the next instant, the figure of the centipede suddenly blurred in front of Yuu, and then ---

"I-It disappeared...?!"

The centipede vanished as if it had dissolved into the air. Yuu then realized, the centipede was sort of strange in certain aspects..... Things like its legs being especially long, and its mouth opening being rather big.....

The teenage boy suddenly opened his mouth and spoke:

"...Lady....."

".....!"

Yuu almost thought her heart stopped beating because of this.

Although she thought that the other party had died already, that didn't seem to be the case. The teenage boy's slightly opened eyes blinked, and even his chest moved up and down regularly.

Even though he wasn't dead, it didn't seem like he was sleeping. His pair of eyes that were as lifeless as artificial objects were not moving in the slightest, and his facial expression was as pale as candle wax.

Yuu was so afraid that she could feel cold sweat coming out of her.

"P-Police... No, I need to call the ambulance ---"

Yuu came back to her senses, and planned on taking out her cell phone.

Just at that instant, a loud buzzing noise came from the teenage boy's hands.

A white object could be seen lying on the teenage boy's hand.

It seemed sort of similar to glasses, but were much bigger compared to the average glasses; they're probably goggles right?

Its heavy lens had become something similar to an LCD screen. There were many little text light dots appearing on its surface, and also buttons and dials on its side. It would probably cover one's ears if

worn right? Just from taking a quick look, one could also tell it was of a considerable degree of weight. The noise seemed to be coming from within the goggles.

Yuu was scared by the sudden sound and dropped her cell phone immediately; the phone fell next to the goggles.

“Uuu...”

Even though she wanted to pick it up right away and reached her hand forward, because her body instinctively resisted getting closer to the teenage boy, her lower half was kept at a distance as she reached her hand.

“[Over exceeding recording... capacity limit... stop... over exceeding recording... capacity limit]”

A machine-like voice could be heard mixing along with the buzzing noise; it was saying those lines repeatedly.

Yuu turned her face to her cell phone, and reached her hand closer.

“Geez, Why am I so unlucky today...!”

After her fingertip confirmed the metal’s sensation, she hurriedly pulled it back to her.

“[Confirmed... Replaying...]”

“...!”

However, she immediately realized that the object she was holding onto in her hand was not her cell phone, but rather the white colored goggles. The freezing cold sensation and heavy weight caused her to instinctively want to throw it away.

“...Lady...”

Yuu’s hand stopped moving. The voice that she just heard --- was exactly the same voice as the teenage boy that was lying on the ground.

“Want to... fight together with you...again.”

Yuu gazed straight at the goggles.

It was a heavy and strong, yet sorrow-filled voice.

“ ... ”

Yuu froze right on the spot.

The teenage boy's short sentence deeply moved Yuu's heart. His voice was more touching than any voice that she had ever heard, more so than any of the scenes from movies and dramas she'd ever watched up to now.

“What are you doing right now...? No... That must be a meaningless question. You must still be fighting. You're that kind of person after all.”

Perhaps because he was running while speaking, the teenage boy's voice was echoed up and down; there was also the sound of water puddles being stepped in.

“--- Lady.”

Yuu 's expression twitched as a sense of uneasiness enveloped her.

That feeling of uneasiness was the strongest one that she had ever felt in her life.

“You're always fighting... Hiding your pain, shouldering other people's pain, that's why we entrusted everything to you. Although I don't know how the soldiers felt when they were sent off to the battlefield, but it should be no different from what we felt right? Each and every one of us is just an ordinary soldier. Whenever we defeat an enemy, one of us will fall as well. But...B-But, whenever we turn our heads around, you are there. You are always there... Just knowing this alone, we can risk our lives for you... I really wanted to fight side by side with you again... Lady...”

His running sound came to a halt as his voice became weaker and weaker.

Don't say it anymore...!

Yuu realized one thing.

This teenage boy was using the last of his last strength to speak, and was on the edge of collapsing any second. This person, who Yuu had never seen before, was in the midst of a crisis of his life.

And now, Yuu was listening to the teenage boy's voice with all her heart, even though it was not because of her own will.

A premonition suddenly emerged in her mind.

If she were to continue listening to this voice, then she herself would definitely ---

“My (Mushi) is already... I’ll probably become a Fallen once again... Even though these goggles were something that I took from an enemy, it seems to have a recording function. I hope that it is one of the (Mushibane) that picked this up. As for the CD that I left behind, I only hope that (Ladybird), you, see the content inside; no one else can see it. Lady, only you...”

A sudden slight laughter was mixing along with his heavy panting.

“Ah... No, aside from you, there’s someone else that I want to see this. Our biggest enemy... (Kakkou)... It would probably be amusing for that guy to see the contents of this thing wouldn't it? What reaction would he give while watching it? Knowing that what “they” were actually doing all this time...”

Yuu could clearly hear the teenage boy’s heavy panting. Under what kind of situation would someone make that kind of heavy panting? She wondered.

“Lady..... Lady.....”

His voice was filled with his feelings.

“Want to fight by your side once again..... As Hibino Kazufusa, no, as a member of the army protecting you, as (Centi)...”

The teenage boy’s voice ended there; there was only silence following after that.

“...”

Yuu lowered her head to gaze at the goggles that she was holding tightly onto in her hands, and noticed there was liquid dripping down onto it.

She originally thought those were raindrops, but they weren’t.

“Ah.....?”

She finally noticed that she was crying.

She herself didn’t even know when she started crying.

I really shouldn’t have listened to ---

That calm part of her mind was confirming the hunch that she had.

She had heard this person’s “Last words” ---

Yuu gazed at the teenage boy.

He was staring at the sky, not moving in the slightest. He probably could never move under his own will anymore right? Yuu believed so.

Yuu didn't know who he was.

Yuu also didn't know who he was saying those words to.

However, Yuu could clearly feel his powerful feelings.

He was fighting for someone's sake... for that person called (Ladybird). Although Yuu didn't know what kind of battle he went through, she was sure that he had fought with all his might, for the sake of that one person, (Ladybird). And all of his feelings and thoughts were recorded in those remarks.

Yuu picked up the CD disk that was next to the teenage boy --- (Centi)'s foot.

Is this the CD that he mentioned...?

"I should... hand it to the police..."

Yuu turned around facing the streets.

Yuu didn't understand what had exactly happened to the teenage boy. The only thing that she was sure of was that this matter was not a simple thing; it might not just be an incident.

Suddenly, a voice filled with wrath came from the goggles.

"(Centi)... you fucking bastard!"

Yuu was so startled that she dropped the goggles.

"You fucking (Mushibane)'s survivor! Did you think you can escape from me, (Kasuou)-sama, by robbing me of those goggles? I have already found out your whereabouts, I will be right there to slay you!"

Even though the goggles were on the ground, the raging voice could still be heard very clearly. Although that person was using a male's tone, her pitch was high. The owner of the voice seemed to be a female.

"I'll tell you just this; it'd be useless even if you go to the police for help! I had already notified them about you being a Mushitsuki! The head director has already issued the order to kill anyone that has the CD right on the spot!"

Yuu was dumbfounded.

“M-Mushitsuki.....?”

She looked at the teenage boy that was lying on the ground --- His appearance was just like an ordinary teenager.

(Mushi) ---

It was probably around a decade ago or so, that rumor regarding such existences had begun to spread.

It was said that these creatures would infest teenage boys and girls, and grow by devouring its host's dreams and wishes. Although the size and characteristics varied, due to them sharing similar appearances as insects, they were called the (Mushi). One could never escape from the shackles of the (Mushi) once infested. And in order to use the (Mushi)'s power, they must pay a cost --- which was to sacrifice their “Dreams”. And if a Mushitsuki's dreams were fully devoured, only death awaits them ---

(Mushi)'s existence was never officially acknowledged, but rumors regarding them from those who had witnessed could be heard just about anywhere. Right now, (Mushi) and Mushitsuki had become synonymous for terror, and suffer from discrimination.

Yuu suddenly realized.

“D-Did she just say... kill...?”

The person holding the CD right now, doesn't that mean Yuu?

Her heart began to beat violently again.

Run away ---

The strongest uneasiness she ever felt in her life was enveloping her completely.

Throw the CD away, and run away! I didn't see anything, and didn't hear anything!

“.....!”

Yuu gasped.

The teenage boy that was on the ground --- (Centi), was gazing at her.

1.01

Shiika Part 1

Shiika was standing still, surrounded by the sound of cluttered footsteps.

Many people walked past Shiika, who was hanging her head low.

A woman walked closer to Shiika; it seemed like she wanted to give Shiika a tissue sample.

“.....”

Shiika still didn’t raise her head; her face was a bit pale.

Perhaps the tissue-handing woman had given up; she looked at Shiika for a bit before leaving.

Not so long after Shiika felt relieved, numerous teenager boys surrounded Shiika. They looked at the petite Shiika while talking amongst each other; she couldn’t hear what they were talking about.

Just then, one of the teenagers lowered his body and gazed at Shiika’s face.

“.....!”

Shiika’s shoulders trembled as she shrank her whole body.

There wasn’t anything reflected in the pupils of the teenager that was closing in on Shiika. Not only was Shiika’s figure not shown, there weren’t even a slightest reflection of light.

The voices of the teenagers could be heard coming from above Shiika.

Shiika pinched her lips, hoping that they would leave her alone soon.

Not a single passerby had turned their head around to look at Shiika since then. Everyone displayed lifeless expressions as they walked about like machine dolls. Although she could see the figures of middle-aged women chitchatting in front of her, their voices still came from above her head.

Within the range of her vision, the street extended all the way beyond the horizon.

However, Shiika was the only one alive in this scene. This street, that was filled with emotionless expressions, caused Shiika to recall the isolation facilities that accommodated her once before --- (Garden).

The street of Fallen --- (Garden).

The instant when Mushitsuki's (Mushi) were killed, they would lose all their emotions and memories, and become will-less empty shells that would only obey external commands—"Fallen". Mushitsuki were in fear of their dreams being devoured by their (Mushi), as well as becoming a Fallen should their

(Mushi) ever be killed. After turning into a Fallen, (Mushitsuki) could never return to being normal— this was what everyone had believed up till now...

However, just a few months ago, an individual recovered from Fallen for the first time ever.

“...Don’t...!”

On top of Shiika’s clothing, which was a white colored one piece similar to the one that hospital patients wear, an insect appeared.

It was a snow white colored firefly. However, it was different compared to normal fireflies; its body was giving off a blue white aura.

The firefly spread its wings, in an attempt to take off, but was immediately stopped by Shiika’s hands.

I’m fine already.....!

Shiika shouted desperately within herself. The firefly quietly stared at Shiika’s expression, before folding its wings.

Anmoto Shiika --- She was the first Mushitsuki ever to awaken from the Fallen status.

Several months ago, in order to compete for Shiika who’d just awakened, numerous intense battles had occurred. To Mushitsuki in general, Shiika was their only hope on how to revert from the Fallen status; hence they could not help but trigger a war to despoil Shiika.

There were two organizations that were involved in the war. One was the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau which disguised itself as an investigation agency to the public— But was actually a government top secret agency that deployed Mushitsuki to capture, isolate, and turn other Mushitsuki into the "Non-existent creatures" that they claimed them to be to the public.

The other organization was a rebel organization assembled by groups of Mushitsuki, the (Mushibane).

The result of the war was victory for the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau. A Mushitsuki codenamed (Kakkou), defeated the leader of (Mushibane), a teenage girl codenamed (Ladybird); and successfully captured Anmoto Shiika. (Mushibane), which had lost its leader, gradually fell apart from within; while Shiika was kept under the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau's surveillance.

These were the incidents that happened two months ago.

Shiika had once deprived many Mushitsuki of their dreams. Her power was just too overwhelming, even a momentary loss of control was enough to turn the surroundings into ruins.

“I’m not afraid anymore.....”

Shiika raised her head, and gazed at the emotionless street.

I won’t run away anymore

If I were to run away, I wouldn't be able to fulfill that promise that we made together.

Daisuke-kun ---

Shiika called the name of the teenage boy that was somewhere far away within her heart.

“...!”

A sudden burst of light covered Shiika's sight.

In front of Shiika's squinting gaze, the street that was originally there had disappeared. It was as if everything that happened was just a dream; even the buildings and the crowds had also vanished without a trace.

The place where Shiika was situated now was a vast dome-shaped space.

The height of the ceiling was at least a few meters tall. Many lighting equipment and loud speakers could be seen hanging off the exposed metal framework. The sound of footsteps and conversations that she heard from before on the street must have originated from there.

Aside from Shiika, there wasn't anything moving in this vast space that was as large as a baseball field. There were only complex mechanical devices connected with countless wires surrounding her in this space. The sound of an air-conditioning functioning came from above.

The white robed figures that brought Shiika here referred to this place as the “Isolation facilities”. Similar to the one of the East Central Division, this place as well was buried deep underground.

Just then, a tremor similar to an earthquake came from below Shiika.

The only access door of the isolation facilities began to slowly open. It seemed like a door that couldn't be pushed open by merely human strength.

The white robed people must have come to pick her up right? This scene had been repeated over and over again for a whole month ever since Shiika was transferred here from the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau's Headquarters.

However, Shiika's expectation was wrong today.

The first one that stepped into the isolation facilities was a white-suit-wearing woman; a person that Shiika had never seen before.

After this woman, another suit-wearing slightly overweight man, and the usual robed figures followed directly behind.

In addition, there were a few other white-clothed figures wearing giant mechanical electronic goggles and heavy long coats which seemed to focus more on protection rather than agility; one could also see large belts wrapped around it.



"I finally get to meet you, (Fuyuhotaru)."

The woman that was leading ahead showed a smile, and moved her face closer to Shiika.

"I'm sorry. My myopia is pretty bad, but I dislike wearing glasses. So I can't really see that well if I don't move in this close... Come; let me take a closer look at you!"

The smiling woman moved her face closer.

"...?"

Shiika frowned.

The woman that was closing in on her had a calm expression that would make one feel at ease. Her slender eyes and the mole beneath the corner of her eye made her really stand out. Her age should be around twenty five years old. Not only was the woman not afraid of Shiika, she even approached Shiika very affectionately.

In contrast to the woman, the attitudes of the figures behind her were obviously different. They were looking at Shiika with terrified gazes, while keeping a distance with the woman in front.

Because the woman had moved her face so close that one could even feel her breathing, Shiika could not help but move back in response.

The smile disappeared from the woman's expression.

"Ah....."

A burst of chills ran down Shiika's spine.

There was only a short distance between them, yet the woman's gaze immediately fixed onto Shiika. Shiika instantly stopped breathing as an unknown fear invaded her body. It felt as if invisible chains were crawling up her feet, freezing her in fear.

Within Shiika, who had experienced death quite a few times already, her instinct was sounding the strongest alarm ever.

This person is very dangerous ---

"It seems like I'm over doing it... It can't be helped, we just met after all."

The woman returned to her standing posture, and smiled once again.

"But you just don't know... don't know how much I love you."

"V-Vice director, that should be enough right? Let's go back to the monitor room and observe from there!"

The man next to the woman was speaking hurriedly as if the emotions that he stored within him had erupted. From the look he had from gazing at Shiika, one could clearly tell that he was terrified.

“Even if her appearance is no different from a normal girl, “She” is undoubtedly that Hishi level one ranked Mushitsuki! If there’s a mishap, who knows if this isolation facility would make it or not..!”

“Mishap? That’s impossible, Commissioner Inose.”

“Eh?”

“Because from now on, she will also be in love with me.”

The woman gently hugged Shiika.

“Please forgive us for treating you as such, but everyone is doing this for your sake... Everything has to be done for the sake of releasing you from the shackles of (Mushi)...”

The woman’s gentle voice was ringing in Shiika’s ears, causing her awareness to disappear subconsciously.

“V-Vice director... She is a Mushitsuki ---“

“Do you have any doubts, Commissioner Inose?”

The woman turned her head around and smiled without hesitation:

“Do you doubt the love between us?”

A heavy silence immediately enveloped the whole isolation facility.

“No... I do not...”

Inose lowered his head, before finally squeezing out that line. A droplet of his sweat dripped onto the floor.

“Let’s get out of here, (Fuyuhotaru).”

The woman said so. The frightened Inose immediately interrupted:

“Y-You can’t, vice director!”

“Why not?”

“Although (Fuyuhotaru) is accommodated under the Headquarters, she’s a property shared by the whole Special Environmental Preservation Bureau! If we were to conduct level B or higher experiments, we need to first receive permissions from other branches, before applying for a permit from the head director. We should at least consult the head director that’s currently traveling abroad for advice before we do anything...”

"Isn't the best time to test us, the subordinates' abilities, precisely when he is not present? Isn't that right?"

"B-But ---"

"You also don't want to stay in a place like this right?"

The woman asked the Shiika. Shiika didn't know what to say.

"See, she also said this place is too boring."

The woman smiled once again.

"B-But... That....."

"What's the progress of the experiment?"

"..... By sending the experimental variable to the three-dimensional image simulated living space, we have collected varying types of statistics and information. At our current stage, we still can't allow her to go out in the real streets... After confirming her differences between a normal Mushitsuki, we will then move onto the next stage of the experiment ---"

"Please immediately prepare the transfer of (Fuyuhotaru). It shouldn't be a problem right, experimental squad director?"

"Y-Yes! Eh, but... we... haven't obtained all of the data yet..."

"I have to go now. Take care, my lovely child."

The woman released the arms that were hugging Shiika, and used her hands to hold up Shiika's cheeks.

"I'm Miguruma Yaeko, the vice director of the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau. Remember that okay?!"

At a distance in front of Shiika's nose, Yaeko slowly moved her lips:

"It's Mi-gu-ru-ma Ya-e-ko. Got that?"

Yaeko was still smiling when she lightly kissed Shiika's forehead.

"Let's go, Commissioner Inose."

"Y-Yes."

Yaeko turned around and said:

"Next we're going to inspect the condition of another level one ranked... How's "Sleeping Beauty" doing?"

“S-Still the same, no response ---”

Shiika could hear the conversation between Yaeko and Inose as they left.

“Transfer (Fuyuhotaru) to Building F.”

After saying that line, the person in charge of the experiment left the isolation facilities in a hurry as well.

The only people that were left behind were the five white coat-wearing figures.

Shiika clenched her lips as she followed the instructions and moved forward.

It is fine; I can still bear with it ---

No matter where she was sent to, no matter what kinds of plights awaited her, she would endure it.

Because there was someone waiting for Shiika; someone that made her believe in those words from her heart.

This is actually nothing compared to the pain that you have suffered right, Rina...?

Within her heart, Shiika called for her dear friend.

Tachibana Rina --- also known as (Ladybird), the leader of (Mushibane), who passed away during the final battle of (Garden).

For the sake of creating a place where Mushitsuki could belong, Rina fought to her last breath by sacrificing all of her dreams as a tribute to her (Mushi). This teenage girl who would only cry in Shiika's arms, how much pain had she suffered? No one knew.

Shiika then recalled the scene where she last saw Rina.

At the place where Rina left, where Shiika's (Mushi) had gone berserk; the one “thing” that she saw.

Why didn't I think of it till now?

She originally thought that “thing” had already been destroyed without a trace from her outbreak. But that might just be her assumption; perhaps that “thing” was still there.

Near the exit of the isolation facility, Shiika suddenly stopped walking.

The white coat-wearing figures were terrified as they immediately distanced themselves away from Shiika.

“W-What are you doing! If you want to resist then ---”

“I-I'm not planning on resisting. But, just that...”

Upon seeing the terrified expressions of the white coat wearing figures, Shiika re-acknowledged the danger of her existence once again.

"I want to have something."

".....Something that you want?"

"Yea, no matter where you guys bring me to, I will not resist... So... Please..."

The white coat-wearing figures seemed to feel troubled by Shiika's plea, and were whispering to each other quietly.

Shiika could hear them saying such things in their conversation: "Should we contact the vice director?"

"That's why I said I didn't want to come here!" "Why did the vice director have to pick such timing so as to come here when (Kasuou) and other high ranked members were not around?!"

"(Kasuou)-tan is not in the Headquarters right now?"

Suddenly, a sweet voice unfit to the current atmosphere sounded.

The owner of the voice stood all the way in the back, behind the white coat-wearing figures. In contrast to her child-like tone, she was rather tall. Aside from the goggles that she was wearing was a scarf which covered her head.

"Shut your mouth, (Karasu)! This is not a problem that you can interrupt!" [T/L: (Karasu) = Crow. P.s She also likes to add tan (similar to chan) after people's name]

"Hmm --- Ohh --- So it's that ..."

The slender and tall teenage girl didn't seem to mind in, the slightest, the scolding she received from her comrades. She placed her hand under her chin as if she was pondering about something. After consecutively nodding her head, she suddenly turned and faced Shiika.

"Hey... Your request is simply impossible, (Fuyuhotaru)-tan."

"Eh?"

"Although I don't know what is it that you want, but in here, you're not allowed to bring anything from the outside world! Especially Building F, its security is even more severe; the Mushitsuki that were sent there were merely objects. Not only are they not served a single drop of water, there might not even be a bit of clothing or food!"

That is fine... I ---

Just when Shiika made up her mind, she was immediately shaken by her next line.

"Since that place was only meant for the Fallen after all. But, (Fuyuhotaru)-tan you are ---"

“Didn’t I tell you to shut up? Stop provoking (Fuyuhotaru)!”

Her comrades stepped forward, trying to seize the slender teenage girl.

Just at that instant, a black shadow appeared out of nowhere and landed on the teenage girl’s shoulder. Its appearance was a bit similar to that of a dragonfly, but slightly different in a way as well: an abnormal creature with two pairs of wings and eight feet. The two tentacles stretching from the root of its wings swayed about as its big compound eyes on its head stared straight at Shiika. Its fanged mandible was wriggling at the shocked Shiika as well.

“Does (Fuyuhotaru)-tan really want that thing no matter what?”

The teenage girl’s words caused Shiika to return to her senses.

“...Mhm.”

Shiika nodded her head.

To be honest, she was really scared even now, and even more scared of the things that awaited her in the future, but if she was able to keep the drawing that her dear friend left behind --- the portrait of her promised one around her, then Shiika believed that she could endure everything.

“No matter what... even if I request you to go take something in exchange... will that be okay?”

Shiika again nodded her head.

“Under--stood. Then I’ll leave my fate up to you, (Fuyuhotaru)-tan!”

“...Eh?”

The black insect on the teenage girl’s shoulder suddenly began to transform.

The dragonfly’s wings became tentacles and instantly wrapped around her body. The tentacles then fused as one with her goggles and cloak, slowly turning them to a black color. After transformation, the goggles turned into two lens-like objects that were similar to an insect’s compound eyes. Her long coat was split into four parts, before turning into two pairs of long slender wings behind her back.

“(Karasu) You...!”

Her comrades were stunned by this as they tried to act, however the teenage girl had already acted before them. Two tentacles stretched out from the root of the wings behind her back and tripped their feet.

“Woah!”

The two in the front fell onto the floor because of this, also implicating the two behind them.

In the next instant, the slender teenage girl appeared in front of Shiika.

It was because the teenage girl had flapped her wings, and made a short flight. She used her arms to hug Shiika tightly before taking flight again.

“Ah.....!”

After her body felt the pressure of air resistance, Shiika noticed that she was already far away from the white coat-wearing figures.

No, it was all because the teenage girl who was holding onto Shiika was flying really fast at low altitude, causing them to arrive at the center of the isolation facility almost instantly.

“(Karasu), what’s the meaning of this?!”

Four Mushitsuki appeared and blocked the exit of the isolation facility.

Alarms began to blast as the door began to slowly close up.

Because of the air pressure of acceleration, Shiika puckered her cheeks as she took a look at the teenage girl’s (Mushi).

“That (Mushi) is the same as (Kakkou)-kun’s...!”

“That’s right... It’s a super-rare Fusion type. But... compared to him, I’m different ---”

“What are you doing?! Hurry up and catch them! The opponent is nothing but a no-rank weakling! If she were to cause (Fuyuhotaru) to go berserk, everything will be over!”

A furious voice suddenly came from the speakers overhead.

“That’s right. I’m super weak! So that’s why we are running away now! Hang on tight!”

“--- Run --?”

Shiika’s word was overwhelmed by the sudden burst of air pressure.

The teenage girl named (Karasu) instantly flew high into the air.

The isolation facility that was enveloped by silence just a second ago was now overwhelmed by shouts and the sound of alarms. Undoubtedly, Shiika and this teenage girl were the center of this chaos.

“Even if we were to escape through the front gate, we’ll be immediately caught. Let’s escape through the top then!”

Shiika’s view was half covered by (Karasu)’s soft breasts as she caught a glimpse of iron stands flashing by them one by one.

“.....!”

This time, a sudden burst of pressure from the opposite direction invaded Shiika's body. And it was because (Karasu) suddenly made a stop in the middle of the air; Shiika thought that she almost passed out from that.

"Hey, (Fuyuhotaru)-tan, destroy that. It should be connected to the upper ground."

Shiika raised her head to look above, and saw that there was a hole in the middle of the iron wall with a size that would possibly allow one person to go through. From the outside, one could see the spinning blades of a giant fan through the metal mesh; the hole was probably a vent used for air-conditioning.

"Destroy that, it should be rather easy for you right?"

"I... can't."

Shiika finally responded.

"Eh? You can't use your power?"

"I don't... want to use it."

"..... Seriously... (Fuyuhotaru)-tan, if you're going to be stubborn at times like these, I'll seriously spank your booty okay? Do you want us to be caught right here right now?"

Shiika bit her lips and shook her head.

Once she used the power of her (Mushi), Shiika was unsure whether or not she could control it or not.

That was also the reason why Shiika didn't escape from this facility.

Her power had once trampled countless dreams ---

Four years ago, as well as the outbreak a few months ago, she had turned more than hundreds of Mushitsuki into Fallen. They were the same as her, the same as her dear friend Rina; Mushitsuki each holding their own precious dreams.

She really didn't want to see anymore Mushitsuki... shedding their final tear of life in front of her anymore.

Even though they were all Mushitsuki that harbor dreams, and had to fight in order to survive. Different from Tachibana Rina and (Kakkou), Shiika chose a different path, a path of "No Fighting".

"Mmm --- this is quite troublesome; I guess I can only rely on myself to solve this?"

Two tentacles appeared from behind (Karasu). The tentacles wrapped around the metal mesh, and forcefully pulled it out. After that, it began to advance toward the fan. However, the high-speed gyrating blades easily cut the tip of the approaching tentacles.

"Ughh.....!"

(Karasu)'s expression distorted in pain because of this.

Whenever a (Mushi) was injured, the damage would rebound back to its host mentally. Shiika who had personally experienced, locked her brows again.

Below them, the white coat-wearing figures were grabbing onto their flying (Mushi) and gradually approaching.

(Karasu) laughed with a self-deprecating tone.

"Can't even destroy this thing... Ahah, why am I this weak...?"

"(Karasu)-san..."

"I don't like people calling me that, just call me Ubuki!"

The tentacles began to challenge the fan once again.

"Mm...Mmmm....."

Despite it being cut down one by one by the fan, the tentacles were still moving forward.

"You no-rank Mushitsuki that only knows how to fly! Don't you dare to think you can get away like this!"

The (Mushi) that was rapidly approaching showed its claws, charging straight at Ubuki.

And just at that instant, Ubuki's tentacles seized the fan; after a sharp sound resulting from metal friction, the blade of the fan stopped spinning.

"Ahhh!!!"

Ubuki used all her strength, and uprooted the whole fan. After spinning a few times, the tentacles threw the fan at the incoming (Mushi).

"Woah!"

"Whew...Ha...! Let's go now, (Fuyuhotaru)-tan!"

Without waiting for Shiika to respond, Ubuki accelerated at once, narrowly dodged the incoming enemies. The remaining three (Mushi) bit the thin air where they were at.

".....!"

Ubuki and Shiika charged into the vent where light couldn't reach.

The strong wind pressure blew Shiika's hair. Within this dark tunnel, Shiika was unable to understand how Ubuki was able to see and fly at such a blinding speed. Where would this ventilation hole lead them to? Shiika pondered about that as light occasionally flashed by them from left to right.

“First of all, we have to get away from the Akamaki City.....!”

Shiika seemed to have heard the voice of Ubuki’s whisper.

Hibino Kazufusa's turbid eyes gazed straight at Yuu.

Yuu gulped down her breath as she tightly clenched onto the CD in her hand.

Within the eyes of the teenage boy which could not reflect anything — what exactly was he trying to tell Yuu?

Yuu understood what the teenage boy wished for.

"N-No... That's impossible..."

Yuu shook her head, and took a step back.

"I don't even know who that (Ladybird) person is... Not to mention, this matter involves Mushitsuki..."

The teenage boy had become like this all for the sake of delivering the CD to the person named (Ladybird)— and now, someone known as (Kasuou) was coveting this disk; furthermore, it seemed that the police were on their side as well.

"Aside from Lady... No one else can see it..."

From the goggles that were being beat by the raindrops, the teenage boy's voice rang again.

This was undoubtedly (Centi)'s "Last Words".

Yuu swung her head to one side.

This is just too sly of you ---!

Yuu cursed at the teenage boy before her within her heart.

The emotions that she hated the most: uneasiness and fear. She was nothing more than an ordinary junior high student... who liked working hard for her education, and was scheduled to graduate to a senior in two months. She would smoothly get admitted into (What her friends stated as, "Average") Ouka East High School, and live a quiet three-year high school life. As for the university entrance exam that came after that, she planned to work hard in order to prepare for it as well. Of course, her top choice would most likely be some run-of-the-mill university that she could get into without even trying—

"Your lack of response means you're beat doesn't it? (Centi)! I...(Kasuou)-sama... shall immediately send you to heaven— Oi, go contact (C)! Tell her to transmit this bastard's location to my spare goggles—"

(Kasuou) roared loudly. Her ending statements seemed to be directed towards the people around her.

"I'm going to tear you to pieces, (Centi)!"

"Want to... fight together... with Lady once more..."

The two voices that came from the goggles were fighting against each other inside Yuu's head.

"Lady..."

--- Within Yuu's heart, some sort of string snapped.

"Ahhhhh.....!"

Stepping over the puddle on the ground, Yuu picked up the goggles. She held the CD and the goggles in her arms, and ran away from the scene.

Even though her whole body was beat by the furious rain, Yuu still ran through the narrow alley at full speed. However, directly before the exit of the main road, she suddenly stopped.

I can't go out to conspicuous places, (Kasuou) said... the police was on their side.

Yuu held back her frightened tears, turned around, and ran back into the narrow dark alleys. How could she still analyze so clearly even though her mind was in a mess? She calmly thought about it somewhere within her head.

--- *Where should I go? Who is (Kasuou)? And where is this (Ladybird) person?...*

So scared, so scared, so scared.

Why was she running?

Up until now, Yuu had always been very prudent. During P.E. class, she definitely did not do anything that could cause her to become injured. Even if there was something that she suddenly wanted, she still saved the previous month's pocket money and never dared to spend it.

Don't understand! I don't understand myself anymore!

Yuu's heart was beating violently. Even though she clearly felt the fear of being hunted, she still managed to recall the map of Akamaki City, where she had been living up till now.

First... I need to stay calm! The place where I won't be found out that easily is

The first place that came to mind was the park along the shortcut leading from the cram school to the national highway. Even though she might pass by that location in the morning, she wouldn't usually go anywhere near there during this time of day. However... that place was the only place which she could think of at that moment.



“Lady...”

“...!”

From the goggles came the teenage boy’s voice. Yuu’s heart, as if it wanted to break out from her body, beat furiously against her chest.

“P-Please stop talking! Everything is all your fault---”

Suddenly, Yuu subconsciously came to a halt, and noticed that some of her front hair was dancing in the air.

Accompanied by the sound of air being ripped apart, the ground cracked before her.

“...!”

Yuu gasped as her whole body stood dumbfounded.

An unknown black object flashed across her view and blocked her path. If she hadn't stopped at that instant she would, most likely, had gotten pierced by it and turned into a human skewer, wouldn't she?

“Eh...? What...!”

When Yuu came back to her senses, she had already started running. But because she crashed into a pole with her shoulder, she kneeled on the ground.

“Yo, you dropped something, midget.”

In front of Yuu, who turned her head around, an abnormal monster appeared.

There were no other adjectives which could describe it. Amidst the quiet alley, was a mist-like "Thing". A part of the mist extended outwards, before forming into a claw-like shape halfway. But it wasn't any ordinary claw; it was a gigantic sharp claw that was almost the same size as Yuu. The voice just now, originated from within the mist.

After the sound of a hard object falling onto the ground, an object rolled to Yuu's feet.

It was her cell phone— the phone that she dropped next to the teenage boy, and forgot to take back. From the looks of its shattered LCD screen, it was probably already broken.

“Who are you? (Mushibane)’s comrades?”

A familiar high-pitched voice suddenly came again from the mist; it was the voice of the shouting (Kasuou) that Yuu had heard before, from the goggles.

The startled Yuu shook her head left and right desperately. Due to the overwhelming fear, she couldn't even sound a word.

"Well, it doesn't matter. Be a good kid and hand that thing over... You have it right? Did (Centi) ask you to deliver it?"

Yuu shook her head once again.

"Oi, listen up! I asked you two questions, one is whether you have the disk or not, and the other one is are you (Centi)'s comrade or not. You only shook your head, how the fuck would I know what you mean?"

However, Yuu was still shaking her head.

"...If so... Ok, let's switch to a much simpler method."

(Kasuou) shouted impatiently:

"Just go die, brat!"

Before (Kasuou) shouted this line, Yuu had already dashed toward the opposite direction of the mist. Her body that was unable to move due to fear before, was now running desperately on instinct.

The sound of destruction came from behind Yuu. Countless claws that derived from the center of the mist began to wriggle like spiders, and charge straight at her.

The walls of the surrounding buildings were crumbling from its devastation, and the surrounding wire poles snapped in half; the broken wires were sparking blue and white lightning in the midair.

"W-What?! What was that? What the hell is going on???!!!"

Monster, monster, monster.

This word filled the mind of Yuu who was currently running desperately.

T-That ... is the (Mushi)...?

The creatures, that only existed in rumors till now, was now flying over Yuu's head. She had always thought that it was merely a rumor. But if it really existed, it would definitely be ranked as first in the list of things that Yuu absolutely didn't want to see in her life.

And now, Yuu just wanted to run away from this terrifying existence as soon as possible, even her destination didn't seem to matter to her anymore.

The mist's speed didn't seem to be as quick as Yuu thought it would be. By the time Yuu had escaped the labyrinth-like narrow alleys, there wasn't a single trace of the mist. Should she consider herself lucky? Or was this just a tiny piece of happiness, which could bring a person to tears; amongst this series of misfortune...

Yuu immediately hid behind a wire pole that was a distance away from the inclined street ahead.

What should I do?!..... this place will definitely be found very soon! And then that claw will... !

The rationale that she was barely sustaining seemed to have reached its limits. The Yuu now couldn't even perceive the simple logic that her hiding place was too damn exposed.

I'm going to get killed...! I'm going to get killed right here...!

Irresistible trembling was coming from within her body.

Just then, the sound of someone talking suddenly came from her side.

"...Hoo, let's take a break right here. That was really tiring..."

Yuu originally thought (Kasuou) appeared, and was so scared that she almost had a heart attack— only to find out that it was a completely different tone than (Kasuou).

"A-Are... you okay?"

"Seriously, it was all because of (Fuyuhotaru)-tan wouldn't help me! Onee-san I had to work extra hard okay?!"

"Uhm, Shiika... I'm Anmoto Shiika."

Yuu walked back into the alley fully alarmed.

There wasn't anyone when I passed by before... Where they came from?

The streetlights illuminated the duo's figures.

The two of them appeared to be taking shelter from the rain in front of a closed restaurant. It was a petite teenage girl, and a tall slender figure who wore strange white garments. Judging from the voices, the fully white attired figure should also be female.

"S-Save....."

Just when Yuu was about to call them for help, she immediately stopped. It was because she noticed the goggles that were covering the female's face, and became stunned.

Those goggles were exactly the same as the ones that were in Yuu's hands. Concerning the long coat that the woman was wearing— it was some strange design that Yuu had never seen before.

Large belts could be seen wrapped throughout her body. Although Yuu didn't know what kind of materials the coat was made from, she could at least deduce that it was completely waterproofed.

W-Why is that person wearing the same goggles? W-Who... is she? Enemy? Or a comrade?

Next to the Yuu who was in a chaos, the female's voice continued on.

"It sure is unbelievable just from looking at you... Shiika-tan, are you seriously a level one ranked just like that (Ladybird)?"

"...Lady?!"

Yuu's body moved one step ahead of her mind, and dashed out from behind the wire pole.

The two people that were sheltering from the rain turned to look at Yuu's direction.

As if she had completely forgotten about the doubts she just had, Yuu charged straight into the arms of the white attired figure.

"You know that person called (Ladybird)?! Please save me...! A b-black colored monster is chasing after me!"

"W-Wait, what?? Who are you?! I don't understand a word that you just said!"

The goggles-wearing figure tilted her head to one side. The petite teenage girl next to her also seemed to be confused.

Just then, the sound of earth shaking came from behind Yuu.

"Don't waste my time, you damn brat!"

By the time Yuu turned her head around, the mist-like monster had already appeared into her view.

Upon seeing the center of the mist which was illuminated by the streetlights; Yuu, this time, was truly pushed into the depths of despair. Rising amidst the black mist was a figure fully clad in white clothing.

Just as Yuu had expected from her voice, (Kasuou) was indeed a girl. She had beautiful shoulder-length blond hair, and a petite but curvaceous body. Although the large goggles covered half of her face, one could still see her sharp canine teeth through her slightly opened vivid lips.

That teenage girl was wearing a snow-white long coat.

Yuu then turned to face the tall slender figure that she just begged for help from. She was wearing the exact same coat as (Kasuou).

Yuu immediately slumped.

I'm doomed ---

This is the worst situation ever, why did I turn to enemy for help...

Yuu instantly lost the strength to run away.

"Wow --- Are you kidding me?"

However, the situation was different from what Yuu had imagined --- the two white-coat wearing figures didn't attack Yuu.

Both of them were staring at each other, while Yuu was in the middle.

"This girl... she actually brought the person that I didn't want to see the most here....."

"(Karasu)? Oi, I didn't ask for support from your squad ---"

Trailing off midway, (Kasuou) became stunned upon seeing the petite teenage girl.

"What.....?(Fuyuhotaru).....?!"

"Ahya, so you already knew what she looked like."

"...Explain this at once, (Karasu)! Why is the Hishu level one ranked (Fuyuhotaru) here?!"

".....?"

Something doesn't seem right...

Yuu recovered to her calm state, and shifted her gaze at each of their expressions on the side.

"Uh... I received a top-secret task issued personally by the vice director: currently executing the mission to secretly transfer (Fuyuhotaru)!"

"Top-secret task? Rather than picking the Ishu level three ranked me, or other high ranking members, the vice director ordered you, a no-rank, to carry out the task? That's really impressive....."

"This is just the result of my everyday diligent hard work!"

"What kind of bullshit are you trying to pull?! Stand there and don't move, if you dare to move, I'll immediately turn you into a limbless human stick."

(Kasuou) warned with a low voice. Yuu saw (Karasu) was contritely biting her lips.

(Kasuou), however, did not immediately pursue (Karasu). Yuu noticed a slight confusion that flashed through the blond hair girl's eyes, she seemed like she was unsure of what to do first... That's what Yuu guessed.

And just then, a timid voice suddenly sounded and broke the heavy atmosphere.

The voice came from the petite teenage girl that had been quiet till now.



Her immature look seemed very childish; to the point where others may become skeptical, if one were to say she was Yuu's classmate. She was looking at (Kasuou) with an innocent expression as if she hadn't the slightest idea of what was going on. Her extremely slender body figure gave an unreliable impression. In addition, Yuu also noticed that the clothing that the teenage girl wore, seemed very similar to the one that (Centi) wore.

"What are... you guys... ummm... doing? That girl, she just said "Save me""

The teenage girl questioned (Kasuou) as if she knew the answer.

"You be quiet. I don't have any obligation to politely explain the current situation to you."

After being angry yelled at, the teenage girl shrank her body.

Is she timid? Or perhaps just an air head?

In the scene that was enveloped by a tense atmosphere, the teenage girl really stood out. She was exuding a strange yet tempting aura that made one could hardly avert their gaze from.

(Karasu) smiled once again.

"No, you noticed the key point, Shiika-tan."

Shiika, that seemed to be the teenage girl's name.

"(Kasuou)-tan seemed really troubled; as if she was unsure whether she should retrieve Shiika-tan first, or that girl! Why is that so? Perhaps that girl has something that is of the same value... or maybe something even more important than (Fuyuhotaru)? How is that possible!? How could there exist anything that is more important than the Hishu level one ranked Shiika-tan..."

"(Karasu), you bastard ---"

"For example... the thing that this little girl has been carefully holding since the beginning?"

Upon seeing (Kasuou)'s change of expression, (Karasu) grinned.

"Hey, you over there, where did you get those goggles?"

Being suddenly asked by (Karasu), Yuu gazed at the goggles in her hands before replying:

"T-There's a man's voice... said that he wanted to give this disk to Lady..."

Those were all Yuu could say for now, the rest of the words were stuck in her throat.

And then, the sound of someone clicking their tongue came, it was from (Kasuou).

"He used the recording function huh? That fucking bastard... makes this so much more troublesome for me... Hey, you! What did that guy say?!"

Upon being glared by (Kasuou), Yuu shrank her body while (Karasu) said with a smile.

“Ohh, I see! So only this girl knows the contents of the recording huh?! Shiika-tan.”

The slender-tall teenage girl turned to the Shiika who was next to her:

"Could you destroy those goggles for me? Because the members' equipment are considered confidential, the goggles were set so that the headquarters could detect their location and retrieve them, regardless of where they were lost. Even though my goggles' are only capable of the communication function, I can destroy them during my fusion... The goggles used by the highly ranked members on the other hand... Well, I don't know the exact details."

Yuu immediately widened her eyes,

So that's why (Kasuou) was able to find me so easily ---

“B-But, this has... the last words of that person name (Centi).”

“The CD or the goggles, which one is more important?”

Upon being asked by that question, Yuu instinctively held the CD tighter. (Centi) fought for the sake of protecting this CD disk after all.

"So just discarding it is not good enough. If they aren't of the utmost importance, then they would be better off destroyed! No need to purposely leave any Intel that SEPB may want."

“(Karasu), You bastard ---!”

“Shiika-tan?”

“B-But... I...”

“It’s not the time for you to be stubborn again okay? If this keeps on, aside from Shiika-tan, this girl and I will both get killed. (Kasuou)-tan is merciless when it comes to that.”

(Karasu)’s words, caused Shiika to suddenly change her expression.

“I’ve decided... The first one will be you, (Karasu)... You’re the only eye sore that I need to wipe out first!”

(Kasuou) lifted one arm, and swung down the giant claw that had already materialized from the mist.

However, the claw immediately stopped.

“.....!”

At the space in between (Kasuou) and the trio, a white colored object gradually floated into the air.

Yuu gazed straight at the scene, almost forgetting what kind of situation she was supposed to be in.

The creature surrounded by the white aura was floating in midair; although it seemed similar to a firefly, a firefly in reality wouldn't emit light throughout its body would it?

Its soft aura enveloped the surroundings.

"[Shatter...]"

A crystal clear voice rang out of nowhere as a bright light fell down from the sky amidst the heavy rain.

"[Just a little...]"

The glowing white snowflake fell onto the object on Yuu's hand.

And in the next instant ---

As if it was being crumbled up like a piece of paper, the goggles in Yuu's hand began to distort. Yuu who was shocked by this immediately threw out the goggles.

The aura enveloping the goggles came in contact with the ground, and made a loud sound as the ground began to crack.

With the destroyed goggles in the center, the ground concaved inwards. Countless cracks could be seen appearing onto the cement-paved road.

Walls, wire poles and buildings were, one after another, dragged into this endless whirlpool of destruction.

"... Stop, I-It's enough...!"

Although the teenage girl cried out, the destruction did not end.

Underground pipes were being crushed from the pressure, causing water to spew out through the cracks of the road.

"W-What...!"

The cracks in the ground pulled the distance between (Kasuou) and the trio further away. (Kasuou)'s figure then disappeared beyond the splashing torrents.

"Gonna fly now! Hold on tight!"

"Eh?"

Yuu's body was suddenly wrapped by a black-cloth like object.

She turned her head around, and saw that (Karasu)'s appearance had dramatically changed. The originally white-colored garments had become a pair of black wings which stretched out from her back. The thing that wrapped around Yuu originated from behind (Karasu).

And then, Yuu flew into the night sky.

1.03

Ubuki Part 1

Surrounded by darkness ---

Whenever she used the power of her (Mushi) to fly, this scenery would always emerge in her mind.

Was it due to the fact that her dream had already been burned out long ago, that caused her to see that kind of illusion?

Surrounded by darkness.

The only thing she could see was pitch darkness.

She stretched her hands into the darkness.

As if she was searching for something; as if she was seeking something.

However, she was unsure of what she was supposed to hold onto with her hands anymore.

In the dimension dominated by the darkness, Ubuki desperately tried to look for something; tried to hold onto something.

However, in the end... Her hands eventually vanished into the darkness, and disappeared.

Indescribable despair and sorrow gripped her heart tightly.

Although it was always the same illusion, and always the same ending, it was the pain, only that pain that she could never get used to.

“.....!”

At that moment, the familiar illusion suddenly disappeared.

After escaping from (Kasuou), Ubuki flew at high - speed through the narrow alleys. She used her arms to carry (Fuyuhotaru), while two tentacles grabbed onto the other teenage girl.

“Mm!”

“Ahhh!”

Making a turn, Shiika and the teenage girl behind Ubuki screamed while wheezing heavily.

Ubuki then raised her head towards the sky, while maintaining her balance with her rapidly vibrating wings. Her vision, which was enhanced by the fusion with her (Mushi), could clearly see the (Mushi) herds that were flying high in the night sky.

Those were the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau’s reinforcements. If she were to raise her altitude any higher, she would definitely be spotted.

With no other options, Ubuki made an emergency stop and flew closer to a window of some two-story building, with the intent to hide. The building seemed to be an abandoned store, and a hole could be seen through the middle of the dust-laden windows.

“Heyo!”

She released a tentacle which was wrapped around Yuu and reached it towards the window; after drilling through the gap, it opened the window from within.

“Hide, hide!! Before the scary enemies find us first, hurry up and hide!”

Shiika and the bespectacled teenage girl jumped into the building through the window, and immediately sat down on the floor.

This caused the dust to scatter, and made the two of them cough. The three of them were soaking wet from the heavy rain, from head to toe.

Ubuki hurriedly closed the window, and stood alert to the situation outside. It was still raining heavily outside.

Finally safely escaped from (Kasuou)-tan. Even though (Kasuou)-tan is almost invisible during battles, her movement speed is extremely slow. As long as we don't face her directly, then we should be able to shake her pursuit.

“Okay! Phew, that was a really close one there... Eh, what’s wrong with you two?”

Ubuki tilted her head, and gazed at the other two that were close to passing out on the floor.

“You... flew so fast... and stopped so suddenly... my breathing... ahh... I feel a rush in my head ...!”

The teenage girl complained to Ubuki, while panting heavily.

Even though they just met, this teenage girl, who was wearing extremely befitting honor-student looking glasses; looked nothing more than a normal junior high student in Ubuki's eyes.

"Uhm... A-Are you okay?..."

Shiika who was also feeling unwell, reached her hand towards the teenage girl, trying to comfort her.

But ---

".....!"

Shiika watched, as the teenage girl who was frozen stiff, suddenly hug her book bag and immediately move back against the wall.

"Ah..."

Upon seeing the teenage girl's reaction, Shiika showed a sorrowful expression.

"W-What exactly are you guys.....?!"

"Hey, that's my line! Do you know how hard I worked to successfully get Shiika-tan out of the Headquarters?! It's all because of you, that we were found by (Kasuou)-tan; onee-san was so scared that I felt like my life span had been shortened by a good several years!"

Ubuki complained while un-fusing her (Mushi) from her body. The goggles and the long coat had returned to their original states, and the tentacles that de-fused from her body turned into a raven dragonfly. [TL: Real name is Chlorogomphus brunneus (カラスヤンマ/Karasu Yanma), since that real name is too long... I will be using raven dragonfly for the nickname.]

"A-Are you guys ... really Mushitsuki...?"

"Can't you tell just by looking --- Oh right, Shiika-tan, so you can do it when you really try huh?! I can't believe that piece of tiny snowflake could have such unbelievable power!"

Although Ubuki was praising Shiika, Shiika lowered her head with a sorrowful expression.

Today was the first time Ubuki witnessed the strength of a level one ranked Mushitsuki, and it was far more destructive than what she had imagined.

It seemed that the incident caused by (Fuyuhotaru) four years ago, which pushed the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau to the brink of destruction, was real after all.

I won't let go anymore ---

Ubuki gazed straight at Shiika.

I have finally obtained, the power that I can use for vengeance against that woman ---

I've waited more than 3 years for this day. Acting obedient under the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau, and being treated like trash... Even so, I still gritted my teeth, and now the opportunity has finally come!

(Sensei), just you wait and see... This time, I'll definitely make that woman have a taste of what it felt like on that day ---!

Ubuki gently placed her hand on her chest, and felt a tiny and hard metallic sensation beneath the long coat.

"Ah.....!"

The teenage girl, that was fully alert just a second ago, sounded a cry as if she remembered something.

"T-That's right...! Lady!"

"Eh?"

Shiika looked at the teenage girl surprisedly.

"Do you guys know that person called (Ladybird)? Where is she right now...?"

"I know her... but..."

It was Shiika that replied, and Ubuki immediately nodded her head and followed:

"Yea, Shiika-tan used to stay with (Mushibane) for a while!"

"Because Rina is my friend."

Shiika bit her lips.

"Then, can you please tell me..... Where is that person right now...?"

“Rina she ---“

“Wait a second, Shiika-tan.”

Ubuki used her hand to cover Shiika’s mouth. The glasses teenage girl frowned.

“If you want us to tell you, then you should first tell us everything that you know. Although, judging by your appearance, you don’t seem to be a Mushitsuki; why would a normal human like you... be chased down by (Kasuou)?”

“That’s because...”

The teenage girl stuttered, thinking about what to say.

(Kasuou) was known as one of the strongest members of the Headquarters. There’s gotta be a serious reason why this teenage girl was hunted down by her. That was why Ubuki decided to save this teenage girl. The secret that this teenage girl holds, perhaps, might become her trump card to use against the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau.

“You two... are not allied with the girl from before right...?”

“You mean (Kasuou)-tan? If we were comrades, then we wouldn’t have been attacked nor would we save you, would we?”

Perhaps according to the teenage girl’s rationale, all the Mushitsuki were grouped as enemies?

In society these days, thinking as such was probably the most correct way. Mushitsuki were nothing more than existences on the same level as monsters. But even so, Ubuki still felt it was hard to accept being feared so blatantly by someone. She pondered whether or not to just snatch the CD that the girl was holding in her hands and kick her out of there. However, Shiika suddenly intervened in between their gazes.

“I think it is normal for you to be afraid of us. Even I’m afraid of myself.”

“...”

“But if you know something related to Rina, I hope you can tell me. Because Rina is my only friend.”

The bespectacled teenage girl looked at Shiika with a troubled look, before shifting her gaze at Ubuki’s direction.

“Booo!”

“Waa!”

Ubuki suddenly made a scary pose, causing the teenage girl to immediately scream and curl up like a small animal with a terrified expression.

“Ubuki-san!”

Shiika immediately scolded her.

The bespectacled teenage girl seemed to have recognized Shiika as someone on her side. She moved closer to Shiika, while hiding away from Ubuki, before telling what had happened.

The teenage girl --- Ebina Yuu, encountered a Fallen known as (Centi) on her way home from cram school. His last words were recorded in the goggles that he stole from (Kasuou). According to the contents of the message, the CD seemed to hold some majorly important Intel. Aside from the person named (Ladybird), absolutely no one else should see it. Yuu followed his will, took the CD and ran away -
--

Ubuki, who listened to her story from the beginning to the end, honestly stated her opinion.

“Yuu-tan you seriously are a big idiot!”

“...!”

“Because of a stranger that you chanced upon, you ended up being hunted down by the SEPB. That kind of thing... Shouldn’t you just pretend like you didn’t see anything and walk away? There’s gotta be a limit to your goody-goodiness!”

Yuu was speechless for a moment, before arguing back desperately with flushed cheeks:

“Of course I know that! I don’t even understand why I did that, myself! But... B-But, that’s the only thing I could’ve done! I have already heard... that person... that person called (Centi)’s voice!”

“So what if you heard him? Did that guy have a hypnosis ability or something?”

“No, it’s not that! Not like that! That person... For the sake of the person called (Ladybird)... For her sake... H-He...”

"Also, let me tell you something. It's impossible for Yuu-tan to encounter the person called (Centi)! (Centi) was the captain of the (Mushibane)'s bodyguard squad, and he's already been turned into a

Fallen by (Kakkou) two months ago. He should currently be accommodated in the Central Headquarters' F building!"

According to the Intel that Ubuki had gathered, there was only one person that had ever awakened from the Fallen state.

And that person was Anmoto Shiika.

Shiika was very special, that's why she was so valuable. She was someone that both the SEPB and the (Mushibane) had been dying to obtain; even if they had to destroy countless streets for her— the one and only trump card.

"That guy may have truly turned into a Fallen, but he could never have been (Centi) for sure! Are you sure he wasn't lying to you.?"

"T-There's no way he would've lied to me! That person really was.....!"

Just then, Shiika walked closer and blocked the astonished Ubuki.

"Thank you."

Yuu gazed straight at Shiika with a surprised expression. Shiika's hands touched Yuu's hands that were holding the CD disk.

"Although I don't know who (Centi) is... I believe that, to him, both this disk and Rina were very important. I have also experienced that sort of situation before so I know... the lonely and sad feelings, the instant when dreams are about to disappear... It could make people feel scared— as if they would disappear just like that... and also... would make a person want to leave their will behind to someone..."

Shiika gazed straight back Yuu with a smile.

"So thank you, thank you for accepting his last will."

"...!"

Yuu, who couldn't hold on anymore, covered her sobbing face with her hands. Soon, large amounts of tears began to overflow.

She leaned her head against Shiika's chest, and cried as loud as she could. After experiencing this series of unfortunate events, Yuu must have pushed herself till now right?

The emotions that she had been suppressing within burst out without holding back.

“...”

Ubuki scratched her head, and looked to the side. The scene of the two of them hugging each together, made Ubuki feel somewhat unpleasant.

--- *(Sensei)...* Why do I feel so irritated...?

“Sorry... for hiding from you guys earlier.....”

After crying, Yuu wiped her tears while apologizing to Shiika.

“I-It’s fine.”

After Yuu had calmed down, Shiika was the first one to move back. In Ubuki’s eyes, it seemed like Shiika was the one that was more afraid of the other party. Although she had just met Shiika not so long ago, she could tell that Shiika probably wasn’t good at being with others.

“I’m Anmoto Shiika.”

“Shiika-san...”

“And me, Shirakashi Ubuki!”

Ubuki called out her name, while taking off her goggles and long coat. Both her hair and the head scarf wrapped on her head were soaking wet. The sweater inside the long coat was sticking onto her body, showing her stylish figure.

“I’m currently a beautiful, amazing, blossoming 16 years old! Yea~~”

While Ubuki put up a victory sign, Shiika let out a surprised sound:

“Ehh?”

“What’s wrong, Shiika-tan?”

“Uhm... I’m... also 16 years old...”

“Ehhhh?!”

Both Ubuki and Yuu gasped at the same time.

“So you two were same age huh?... That’s really unexpected.....”

“Ahaha, I didn’t know we were the same age! Okay, I’ll specially permit Shiika-tan to call me Ubuki directly!”

Ubuki lifted her head high and puffed her chest out while saying so; this however, caused Shiika to lower her head in embarrassment with blushed cheeks.

“How about you, Yuu-tan? 3 years old?”

“I’m already 14 years old!”

“Oh is that so.... Well, just give me that CD, and get going then!”

“Huh... W-What, I have to give this to that person called (Ladybird)---”

“But she’s not here anymore. (Ladybird) died already.”

“Died...?”

Yuu gazed dumbfounded at Ubuki, before shifting to Shiika.

“...”

Shiika pinched her lips, and turned around. Shiika’s silence had indirectly proven Ubuki’s words.

Yuu’s gaze slowly fell onto the ground. With a light sound, the CD that she was holding in her hands fell onto the floor.

“She... died...?”

Yuu muttered weakly. The CD that she had been protecting with her life till now was actually meaningless. Ironically, the person that she needed to deliver it to wasn’t even in this world anymore. She probably suffered from quite an impact right?

“It happened around the time when (Centi) himself became a Fallen... It was probably around two months ago! The beautiful princess, (Ladybird), blew up the whole Hashiba City along with dozens of SEPB members, and then died, the end.”

Shiika stared at Ubuki who was summarizing with an indifferent tone, but Ubuki didn’t care the slightest. She lowered her body, and reached her hand toward the CD disk next to the stunned Yuu’s feet.

"I can't believe that guy could actually defeat that kind of monster... As a fellow Fusion type Mushitsuki, I have to admit he is really something, that (Kakkou)..."

"...!"

Yuu suddenly widened her eyes and snatched back the CD disk before Ubuki could reach it.

"...What's the meaning of this? What else do you want to know, brat?"

Ubuki immediately removed the smile on her face, and closed up on Yuu with a serious expression.

"Kak...(Kakkou)?"

Yuu moved back, and held tightly onto the CD.

"Is there someone named (Kakkou)?"

"What about (Kakkou)-kun?..."

Shiika moved closer. Yuu averted Ubuki's gaze, and turned to face Shiika.

"That guy also said... Aside from (Ladybird), (Kakkou) can also see it... I think... No, he had indeed said that!"

"Yuu-tan, your words are filled with contradictions, you know? Even if that guy was the real (Centi) himself, why would he ever have wanted to give something so important to the enemy that turned him into a Fallen? Giving it to the enemy --- that killed his most important master? Not to mention, (Kakkou) is a Mushitsuki that's even more cold-blooded, and evil than (Kasuou)-tan ---"

"He is not like that!"

Ubuki gasped.

Shiika was looking straight at Ubuki, her tone completely different as if her timid figure from before was just an illusion. She was clearly defending (Kakkou).

"(Kakkou)-kun didn't kill Rina. Because he told me, he couldn't save Rina....."

Ubuki was defeated by Shiika's aura; however, she immediately frowned and replied:

"Although I didn't witness the actual scene of (Kakkou) defeating both (Centi) and (Ladybird) myself... But Shiika-tan, do you understand the meaning of the words that you just said? The reason why you

were captured by the SEPB, wasn't it because of him? Even if it's not like that, wasn't it because of that demon that you were turned into Fallen four years ago?"

"(Kakkou)-kun he... is also my friend."

The words Shiika said caused Ubuki to become speechless. Ubuki even doubted if the teenage girl in front of her had gone insane or not.

That demon is her friend? The person who had turned her into a Fallen, and recaptured her after she had reawakened, she called him a friend?

"(Kakkou)-kun and Rina are friends who harbor the same dream. That's why that person called (Centi) would say that; I can understand. If it's (Kakkou)-kun, for Rina's sake he would probably ..."

"Okay, S-Stop for a second there... The words that you've said are just too simulating, I feel like my head is about to spin... Shiika-tan, could you please be quiet for a moment? Ah, as for Yuu-tan..."

Ubuki reached her hand toward Yuu.

"I won't hurt you, but can you give me that? It shouldn't be anything important anyway."

"...!"

Yuu held tightly onto the CD, and shook her head hard left and right.

"To be honest, even if you gave that thing to that demon, nothing good can come of it. In fact, he may just turn you over to (Kasuou)-tan with a "Here, for you". According to rumors, they used to be on good terms when they were in the same branch."

However, Yuu still shook her head.

"... There's no way a midget like you could deliver it to (Kakkou). It would be difficult enough to just get out of Akamaki city alone. Not to mention, people like (Kasuou)-tan are currently looking for your whereabouts! Do you think this city is even close to the Ouka City where (Kakkou) is situated?"

Yuu continued to shake her head. Upon hearing the name of (Kasuou), her tears began to burst once again.

"Okay okay, I got it! I'll help you give it to (Kakkou). I'm Yuu-tan's life savior, of course you would believe in me right?"

Yuu still shook her head --- This caused Ubuki to reach the limits of her patience immediately.

“Okay, forget it.”

Ubuki approached Yuu, however, Shiika blocked her path; this caused Ubuki to show a displeased expression.

“... Shiika-tan, what’s the meaning of this? All in all, I’m also your life savior!”

“W-What are you planning to do?”

“Isn’t it obvious? I’m going to take the CD, and say bye bye to Yuu-tan. The one I’m protecting is you, who is coveted by the SEP— not Yuu-tan. A person who doesn’t even believe in their life savior ... Isn’t that kind of person the worst of all?”

“...!”

Yuu suddenly realized her stance, and bit her lips.

“Of course, Shiika-tan you can support this girl as much as you want, but do you think you can afford to take the responsibility?”

“Re-Responsibility...?”

“The responsibility if this girl were to die. How’s that? Can you afford to take it?”

Shiika stood speechless, while Yuu shouted with a desperate expression:

“I won’t die! I don’t want to die...!”

“There’s no proof that you won’t die! If you don’t want to die, then give up the CD disk!”

“Why do I have to go through this... T-Today... I was supposed be home by now, after I sent an email to Chie, I would’ve start practicing and reviewing my homework...!”

“Mhm, you should just go do that, that’s why ---”

“B-But, I can’t! I have to do this...!”

Yuu cried as she shouted that.

Ubuki honestly couldn’t understand --- She was clearly terrified, not to mention she didn’t even understand the reason she’d done this in the first place, why was Yuu still so insistent?

Was it because Shiika's gaze encouraged her? But honestly, the things Shiika said were also a mess. She actually said (Kakkou) was her friend, and even defended Yuu who she just met for the first time.

Ubuki's displeasure reached its boiling point, causing her to stare straight at the two petite teenage girls.

"I still have to go get the thing that Shiika-tan wants, and then do a very important thing after that. I don't have any time to waste with kids like you!"

"The thing I want is... the drawing that Rina had left behind..."

Shiika spoke.

"It should still be in the Ouka City... In the Ouka East High School's art classroom..."

"...!"

Ubuki this time was really speechless.

"Ubuki also saved me for a reason right? It's okay, no matter what you say, I'll listen to you... As long as I can find that drawing Rina left behind..."

Ubuki suddenly felt the darkness of despair envelop her completely.

This means, we have to go to Ouka City?

From Akamaki City where the Headquarters was situated to the Ouka City where the East Central Division was situated; just how many enemies would be in their way? How difficult would this whole journey be? Just imagining it would make one feel despair enough.

Ubuki suddenly felt an urge to roar out loud, and beat the crap out of the two in front over her, and make them listen to her. Especially Shiika, she was the main motivation behind her actions, that's why she decided to escape from the Central Headquarters. She actually didn't care in the slightest, about the situation Shiika was going through.

But the weak Ubuki couldn't do anything like beating them up and forcing them to listen to her. If she were to do that, there's a chance that Shiika might rebel and retaliate. Or she may just outright leave Ubuki.

She definitely had to avoid that kind of situation at all cost, since she had finally obtained this tremendous power after going through so much trouble.

“.....!”

Ubuki angrily grinded her teeth:

"Listen up, there is a flying force currently guarding the skies over Akamaki City, so we can't fly. Even if we were to take public transportation, there will definitely be a scuffle along the way, so that's a no no as well. There's at the very least, a small combat squad situated around each district of the city. Strong Mushitsuki like (Kasuou)-tan are everywhere, there are (Mushi) that can see objects from a few kilometers away, and there also exist (Mushi) that are very sensitive to smells. There're absolutely no blind spots in the sky or on the ground. Just escaping from Akamaki City alone is dangerous enough—and you want us to pass through the neighboring Higano City, and travel to Ouka City?"

Upon hearing Ubuki's analysis, Shiika and Yuu's expressions changed.

“And also, the CD Yuu-tan is holding --- For the sake of protecting confidential Intel, the SEPB always uses discs that easily deteriorate, and designed it as such that the data within will corrupt in 3 days. Take a look, there should numbers written on it.”

“.....!”

Yuu looked at the CD. On the transparent case that she held in her hand, a small series of numbers could be seen engraved onto it.

“That's today's date, so that means... The disk was recorded right before Yuu-tan took it from him. The data inside will most likely disappear around afternoon or evening 3 days from now at the latest!”

Ubuki stared at Shiika.

--- *Give it up!*

Escaping from Akamaki City under the Central Headquarters' watch, then passing through Higano City that's still under their control, and then finally arriving at the Ouka City. A journey that has enemies no matter where you look; and you want to arrive within three days, that's definitely impossible!

Just give up! ---

For the sake of telling Shiika to say that line, Ubuki stared at Shiika as hard as she could.

“Let's go, to Ouka City.”

*Oh My *beep* God!*

Ubuki was so close from shouting that line out loud.

Ignoring Ubuki who was clenching her fists, Yuu looked at Shiika happily.

--- I should have never saved her!

Ubuki regretted the fact that she saved Yuu from the bottom of her heart. If it weren't for her, at least there wouldn't be a 3 day time limit.

But in return, Shiika said she would listen to whatever Ubuki said.

Then, Ubuki could only believe in these words. To the weak Ubuki, there weren't any other options.

"Okay, fine! I got it!... Let's go to the Ouka City then!"

Ubuki's line caused both Shiika and Yuu to sparkle with joy.

I will have to find a way and send Shiika to the Ouka City. And as for the CD in Yuu's hand, I'll just have to snatch it when the opportunity arises.

(Fuyuhotaru) is currently standing on her side; no matter what kind of strong enemies they encounter, as long as she's here, they will definitely be able to break through.

(Sensei), I'll take revenge for everyone really soon... !

Right now was the time to make up her mind. As long as they could safely arrive at the Ouka City, Ubuki's wish would also come true.

"But in return, I also have a request."

Ubuki smiled as she said that:

"From now on, the two of you belong to me! I'll take good care of you!"

2.00

Yuu Part 3

Dad and Mom, I'm sorry to tell you this.

But your beloved daughter is currently being hunted by an organization called the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau. I'm not kidding; I'm seriously being targeted by them. Yesterday I almost got killed!

And not only that.

Right now, I'm together with these two people, Anmoto Shiika, and Shirakashi Ubuki; they are both Mushitsuki. The (Mushi) that I thought only existed in rumors, actually are real. I'm planning on going to the Ouka City with them.

As for the reason... Well, even I don't really understand it myself, but I feel like I have to go. Even though I really wanted to forget all about this, and come home right away. After I come home, I'm gonna take a shower first, before calling Chie and apologize for not replying yesterday evening; I also wanted to do my homework from cram school as well. In order to live a life free of uneasiness...

But I must go, in order to meet a person called (Kakkou) at Ouka City. After meeting him, I will then hand him the CD that I received from a guy called (Centi)... I know this is very dangerous, and that I might be putting my life on the line... But --- Oh that's right, I haven't contacted home since yesterday, you guys must have been worried right? But Ubuki-san said that it would be best to not get in contact with anyone. That's why, I'm sorry. After I come home, you can yell at me as much as you want! If I'm able to come home safely that is...

"..."

Akamaki City, which was stormy the previous night, had a clear blue sky today.

High-rise buildings could be seen lined up across the streets, standing side by side next to the national highway. Because of the buildings' dense shadows, the alleys between them appeared to be darker than usual. Through the several inch gaps between the tall buildings, one could see the white clouds that were floating leisurely in the sky. In addition, the freezing cold air from yesterday had also become warmer—today was no doubt the best day to "Escape".

However, Yuu still stood there dumbfounded.

"..."

Her body trembled violently from seeing the unbelievable scene in front of her, causing her to be rooted to the ground.

"Buy that one!"

Ubuki grabbed onto Yuu's book bag, and shook it left and right.

The slender teenage girl was now wearing a sweater, and had a necklace hanging from her neck. The goggles and long coat that she wore yesterday evening, were now in Yuu's book bag. Although Yuu protested desperately, the textbooks and notebooks that were originally in the bag; were still discarded by Ubuki as she stated: "We don't need those."

"Yuu-tan, buy me crepes! I - want - it!~~"

In the direction where the noisy Ubuki was pointing, a cute and lovely pink mobile shop could be seen.

"Crepes! Yuu-tan, buy it!!!"

After seeing Ubuki, who was now swinging her arms and making a fuss, Yuu's expression twitched even harder.

This person, in reality, is someone who acts like this, huh—

Yesterday evening, due to the fact that she was almost scared to death by Ubuki's scary expression, Yuu didn't get to know her true character. But the next morning after sleeping over at the empty store for one night, she immediately had to change the impression she had for this person, Shirakashi Ubuki.

"..."

Turning to her side, Shiika also secretly peeked at the crepes store. Even though she would lower her head shyly whenever she met Yuu's eyes, her gaze never once shifted away from the pink mobile shop

This one here is also ---

Shiika wasn't wearing the one piece clothing that she wore last night, but rather a hooded leather jacket. These clothes were bought by Yuu and Ubuki this morning in a clothing store where there weren't many customers.

"...You two...Do you know what kind of situation we are in right now?..."

Yuu finally opened her mouth and said this:

"...The three of us are being targeted right now, you know that?! Who knows what might happen before we reach Ouka City, we can't waste any money like this ---"

"Cre~pes ---!"

"Y-You're right...We have to save the money..."

The words that Yuu just spoke didn't seem to have any effect on their behavior whatsoever. Even though Shiika agreed with her statement, she would still occasionally turn around and peek at the crepe store.

Looking at them, Yuu could not help but to state her true opinion:

“Are you guys really sixteen...?”

Shiika and Ubuki were both older than Yuu by 2 years. It wouldn't be strange to mistake someone with the stature and appearance of Ubuki, for a college student. A teenage girl like her, begging desperately and shamelessly in the middle of the street for stuff; it was...in a way... quite a rare scene.

“...Speaking of money, why am I the only that has money?!...”

The clothes that Shiika was wearing were all bought with Yuu's money. It seemed that mistaking the payment date for the tuition fee came in unexpectedly handy.

“I already said Yuu-tan you're my property, so of course your money is my money! Hurrrry up~ and buy me the crepe!”

Looking straight at the Ubuki who was now making a fuss on the floor, and Shiika who's gaze began to drift to the customers that were stretching out their hand to hold the crepes, Yuu couldn't even mutter a single word.

--- After a few minutes had passed.

“Hehe, Shiika-tan, let me have a bite of your choco-banana favor!”

“U-Uhm...Yuu-chan, do you also want a bite?”

“.....”

Under the viaduct, Yuu unhappily turned her face away.

The three of them each found a place to sit under the shadow of a pile of waste wood planks.

In the end, Ubuki bought a strawberry-cream flavored crepe, and Shiika bought a choco-banana flavored one.

For the sake of saving money, Yuu didn't buy one for herself. Because one could never know what may happen ahead, one should not simply waste the scarce funding on hand without any consideration. To Yuu, who even tried her best to become admitted into an ordinary high school; something like this was common sense... even if she really wanted to eat one as well...

“Shiika-tan, you wanna have a bite of my strawberry-cream flavor? Ah, I'm not sharing any with the meanie!”

“Didn't I buy it for you in the end?! Why are you still calling me a meanie!”

Yuu growled her complaints, and Ubuki immediately “Woosh” hid behind Shiika.

“How about easy-to-get-mad Yuu-tan then?”



Ubuki said while spitting her tongue like a kid.

Because of the overwhelming anger, Yuu's clenching fists began to slightly tremble.

--- What the hell is up with her?!

Last night, when they just first met, Yuu was scared of Ubuki.

Even though she saved Yuu from (Kasuou)'s clutches, she threatened Yuu to relinquish the CD right after. Her expression at that time was completely different from the idiotic girl she was right now. Aside from being a Mushitsuki, that expression of her when she raised her brows was extremely scary as well.

But after just one night, it was as if she had completely changed into a different person. Although her appearance was still the same, her behavior and manner of speaking were just like that of a kindergartener. Yuu had never seen anyone like her before.

"S-Sorry, Yuu-chan."

Shiika covered Ubuki, and apologized to Yuu.

Shiika was also someone quite strange. She had an extremely quiet and shy personality, and was very kind and gentle towards Yuu. Sometimes, however, she would stare into space, as if she were zoning-out; and give a very unreliable feeling. This morning, Yuu even saw Shiika trip twice in a row onto the floor, as she changed clothes.

"I'm not mad at you, Shiika-san..."

Evading pursuers from the SEPB, while traveling to the Ouka City.

She originally thought that this would be the start of a life-threatening, danger-filled getaway.

But, what's up with this carefree atmosphere ---

The uneasiness within Yuu's heart grew even stronger.

"I have always wanted to try crepes!"

Shiika took a bite of the crepes in her hands, and said with a smile filled with joy.

"Eh... You never ate crepes before?"

"Mm."

Shiika nodded affirmatively; it didn't seem like she was lying.

But that sentence was still hard to believe, Shiika was already 16 years old. Theoretically speaking, she should've had a lot of opportunities to eat crepes.

"I didn't know crepes had this much chocolate!"

“Shiika-tan, you didn’t notice the billboards? Because Valentine’s Day is coming, so they are having an extra-serving of chocolate event right now! This ribbon is also a gift!”

“Valentine’s...Day?”

Shiika tilted her head, and gazed at the ribbon wrapped on the crepe’s wrapping paper.

Yuu frowned.

“It’s Valentine’s Day! The day when a girl gives chocolate to the boy they like...Ehh? Don’t you know what Valentine’s Day is?”

Shiika displayed a spaced-out expression, but immediately nodded her head many times right after.

“Valentine’s Day...I see, so it’s almost Valentine’s Day huh...”

She acted as if she had just recalled something from long ago.

Yuu was becoming more puzzled about this girl.

What kind of life has she been living till now?

“Ah, let’s use this and give Shiika-tan a little “decoration”!”

Ubuki slowly untied the ribbon on her crepe's wrapping paper. While biting the crepe in her mouth, she deftly tied Shiika’s hair with the ribbon. Looking at Shiika whose hair was now tied into a ponytail ---

“Kyaa --- So cute!”

Ubuki’s mood suddenly became better.

“T-Thank you.”

Shiika’s cheeks blushed.

“The boy that I like huh...”

She then muttered that line.

After Yuu waited anxiously for a few minutes, she stared at the two that seemed satisfied from their enjoyment and finally opened her mouth:

“Satisfied? Let’s discuss our plan then!”

“Plan?”

Both Ubuki and Shiika asked in unison.

--- T-These guys...!

Yuu was so pissed that even her shoulders were starting to tremble, and said with a low voice.

"Discuss how and what we need to do to get to Ouka City...!"

"Ah, why didn't you just say so? Instead of saying something like a 'plan' and such... I'll have you know, this isn't a game okay?"

"Of course I know that!"

"You obviously didn't understand! If we're caught, we will be killed!"

Stared by Ubuki's calm gaze, Yuu stuttered.

--- Who's fault you think it is that we're having this carefree atmosphere?!

Shiika tried to calm down the outraged Yuu.

"Both of you should calm down a bit, okay?"

"I am calm! It's Yuu-tan that's acting so high-strung!"

"Why does it turns out to be me?! It's you that's acting high-tension!"

"Stop quarreling!"

Shiika was caught in the middle as Yuu stared at Ubuki. On the other hand, when Shiika wasn't looking, Ubuki spit her tongue like a kid. This kind of childish act enraged Yuu even more.

W-What...?! What the hell is up with her?!

Acting all threatening for a moment, but then immediately acting all wayward while doing childish acts the next moment. Yuu's heart was tortured by the uneasiness since yesterday; the thought of wanting to shout out "Who's the one that doesn't want to escape huh?!" was filling up her mind.

But then due to Shiika's persuasion, both Yuu and Ubuki finally calmed down. However, they refused to look at each other now.

"Well, Shiika-tan, I'm going to explain now okay?"

"Mhm."

Feeling her existence being disregarded so blatantly, Yuu grew even more angry.

Ubuki picked up a stick, and started to draw lines on the sandy ground.

She drew out the outline of Akamaki City, the neighboring Higano City, and Ouka City that followed after them. The map of the cities were portrayed with unexpectedly detail.

“Fortunately, we destroyed (Kasuou)-tan’s goggles beforehand. Otherwise, our intention of going to Ouka City where (Kakkou) is situated might be discovered. As long as the Headquarters doesn’t know where we’re escaping to, they will most likely place their combat squad at fixed locations.”

After briefing the current situation, Ubuki added a few more different sized circles onto the map.

“As I have mentioned last night, flying method would be impossible, because of (Konoha)-tan.”

“(Konoha)?”

“Yeah, a figure that just recently joined SEPB and immediately became a Kashu level four ranked. Specialty is very good eyesight, as long as there are no obstacles, she can see beyond tens of kilometers away. Even if she is not around, there are still flying forces watching over the sky on their (Mushi). If we fly up, we will immediately suffer from their concentrated attack.”

“And here, here, and...here. These locations have strong members situated, we should definitely avoid them at all cost! Especially if we were to found out by (Kasuou)-tan over here, it will be a game over. If ranked purely from combat strength, she would not even lose to (Kakkou)!”

Remembering the horrors of last night, Yuu felt a chill running down her spine.

The monster of mist --- (Kasuou); Yuu was almost killed by her. Even without Ubuki reminding her, (Kasuou) was definitely someone that Yuu absolutely didn’t want to see again.

“This area would probably be dangerous as well, there are (Mushi) that are sensitive to smell and (Mushi) that have special searching abilities situated here. If we get too close, they will immediately notice and surround us. Vehicles are impractical as well; since they probably have wanted posters in the buses and cabs. There will also be personnel patrolling and checkpoints on the big road, so that’s out of the question as well.”

Circles were one after one drawn onto the map.

“Well, a no-rank weakling like me...has been thrown into various squads. Thanks to that, I’m fairly familiar with the Central Headquarters’ combat squad and inspector squad.”

“.....”

Yuu and Shiika carefully gazed at the finished map.

“...Uhm, excuse me, I can’t see a route that we can go through...”

Yuu slowly raised her head, and Ubuki nodded her head naturally in response.

“Didn’t I tell you yesterday?”

Shiika was also looking at the finished map on the ground dazedly.

On the map that Ubuki had drawn, there was only one place that wasn’t being marked.

And that place was their current location, which was also the center of the Akamaki City.

“Ah, I’m sure you’d understand this even without me saying so, but it’d be meaningless for us to go to the police! Even though the police won’t actually look for us, they’d probably put up wanted notices everywhere. And also, we’re absolutely not allowed to move at night. SEPB’s existence is still a secret to the general public, that’s why those guys only act at night when it’s inconspicuous.”

Having to evade this many enemies, and arrive at Ouka City within 3 days ---

Yuu finally understood the recklessness in this matter that she’s was trying to overcome.

A heavy atmosphere suddenly enveloped the three teenage girls.

“Ubuki...”

Shiika raised her head to look at Ubuki.

“There is no way to get past it?”

Ubuki, who was being gazed by Shiika, scratched her head. She used the tip of the stick, and drew a meandering line across the map.

“We can only avoid strong combatants, and move forward with caution. Although this route would take up some time, it’s our only possible path if we want to arrive at the Ouka City within 3 days. Ah, that’s right; we have to set up a rendezvous point.....”

“Rendezvous point?”

“It’s a place where we can meet up in case we got separated! Uhm... Do you know the bridge that connects to the Higano City? It’s right here.”

Ubuki drew a X mark on the map.

“If we flew right under the bridge, I think we should be able to secretly sneak into the Higano City.”

Ubuki closely looked at Yuu and Shiika’s face.

“If we really got separated, you definitely have to go there to meet up, got that? Both of you were saved by me, you mustn't flee halfway!”

“...”

Yuu didn’t respond, she only reached her hand into her pocket to feel the hard sensation of the CD.

Shiika also had the same expression, as if she was pondering about something, and looked back at Ubuki.

“...Okay, this should be enough.”

Ubuki squinted her eyes.

Suddenly, Yuu asked Ubuki a question:

“SEPB... The Special Environmental Preservation Bureau, what exactly is this organization? I already know that (Mushi) have existed up till now, but just what in the world are those people...?”

Ubuki and Shiika gazed at Yuu.

“I at least want to know exactly what kind of people are targeting me.”

“Do you really want to know?”

“W-What do you mean by that?”

“Nothing --- Well...”

Ubuki raised her head, and started explaining with her unique manner of speaking:

“The SEPB's full name is the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau. Although it presents itself as an investigative agency on the surface, it is in actuality, an organization that deploys Mushitsuki to catch and/or eliminate other Mushitsuki. They kill the (Mushi) of the Mushitsuki they capture which turns them into Fallen, and afterwards accommodate them at the isolation facilities. Only the Mushitsuki that are useful are hired directly as SEPB's members. SEPB has several branch divisions in many areas; and this city, Akamaki City, is the Central Headquarters' home ground. The East Central Division, that (Kakkou) belongs to, is located at the Ouka City a city away from here. Each branch division has its own combat squad, inspector squad, experimental squad, Intel squad, and another special squad with normal citizens mixed along with Mushitsuki. In addition, I was originally a part of the Airborne Division of the combat squad! It's different from the monitor squad's personnel that often gets deploy to other places; we only mobilize to engage in battle when there's an order.”

“B-battle...you said?...”

“That's right, (Kasuou)-tan and I were in the same squad! And actually...She and I both go to the same school as well! Did you know the Horusu Seijyou Gakuen? At school, that (Kasuou)-tan is actually---”

“Eeeh?! Isn't Horusu Seijyou Gakuen that super expensive private school?! Wow, Ubuki-san goes to school there? Y-You are...rich after all eh?...I really couldn't tell...”

“Of course not, our tuitions and living expenses are covered by the SEPB. I'm not the type that likes to stick around a place for too long. There seemed to be a lot of things that happened at that school a few years ago, hence we were sent to check on the aftermath of the incidents.”

Ubuki smiled brightly as she squeezed Yuu's neck and choked her; it seemed like she was not happy with Yuu's last sentence.

“A-And...are there...a lot of Mushitsuki working elsewhere?”

Yuu who escaped from Ubuki's grip continued to question:

“Mhm...Not just Mushitsuki, the SEPB’s supporters also help under the table!”

“I had no idea...”

“Of course you wouldn’t! If normal civilians were to know any of this, the SPEB definitely won’t let them off the hook that easily. If they're lucky, it could be just a contract, stating that they would definitely not expose the information. If you're unlucky, then it’s just one knife across the neck; death sentence~”

“Eeh?! B-But...I just...heard everything...”

“That’s why I asked you earlier, are you really sure!”

“N-No one would understand if you were to say it like that! W-What should I do...I-I...”

“As long as Yuu-tan you doesn't tell anyone about this, I think it’ll be fine...Probably...”

After confirming the escape route, the three of them hurriedly left from the shadow of viaduct.

Cutting into shortcut, they entered the crowded residential area.

Every time there was a corner, it was always Yuu that came out to take a look first; poking her head out from the wall, and check if there were any signs of people around. If there were signs of people, they would take another way to go.

The three of them cautiously advanced following Ubuki’s suggested route.

Turning around, they could see the viaduct where they were eating their crepes at. Although it felt like a long time had passed, it didn’t seem like they made much progress.

--- If we follow this pace, can we really get out of Akamaki City by today?

The uneasiness within Yuu expanded bigger and bigger. But if they were to rush, there would a chance that they might be found out by the enemies; that would be the worst scenario. The anxiousness and uneasiness within her grew stronger as time passed by.

At the end of the road, they could hear the sound of cars passing by and crowd’s footsteps.

The national road was right around the corner.

In order to follow the scheduled escape route, it seemed like they have to pass the large crossroad ahead.

Yuu hid in the narrow alley, and observed the situation of the crossroad.

“Yuu-tan is so professional! Could it be that you have been targeted quite a few times already?”

“Hell no! It’s because, Ubuki-san, you and Shiika-san lack awareness to being with!”

Yuu's scolding caused Ubuki to look displeased.

"I have already carefully observed the places where the combatants might be hiding. It's Yuu-tan you that's rushing ahead."

"Setting aside getting to Ouka City for now, if we don't hurry... with our current speed, we might even have difficulty escaping Akamaki City!"

Even now, as she walked on the streets, Yuu could feel her heart being tightly squeezed by nervousness; always worrying within her heart --- did anyone find them yet? Or was (Kasuou) still after them?

This kind of uneasiness was what Yuu hated the most in this world. She would become restless, and couldn't calm down unless she did something.

If she ever felt uneasy about exams, she always had the option to study and calm herself down, right now she couldn't do something like that.

The wind suddenly blew.

It was a breeze with a mix of car exhaust... a type of wind which one could feel anywhere in the city.

"And also, Why are Ubuki-san you always ---"

Speaking it halfway, Yuu suddenly noticed that Shiika was gazing at the sky. Ubuki also turned to look at Shiika.

Shiika was unaware that the two of them were arguing; she gazed at the sky dazedly, while holding up her hands and standing still.

"Shiika-san?"

"Ah...S-Sorry."

Shiika came back to her senses, and looked at them.

"Because the wind felt really good...So..."

Upon hearing that line from Shiika, Yuu frowned.

The freezing breeze of February, aside from its coldness, was the same as other wind that could be just felt anywhere; there wasn't anything new or unique about it.

However, Shiika seemed like she was happy to be able to feel this kind of wind; as if she hadn't felt it for a long time already.

For some reason, the Shiika who was smiling weakly seemed so fragile like an illusion, and gave an impression as if she would vanish away any second.

"I hate this kind of wind the most....."

Ubuki spoke with a cold tone:

"Wet and filled with odor, not to mention the air is also dirty...City wind will always be the same no matter where you go...Just makes me want to puke from smelling it."

"Is there somewhere else that's different?"

Shiika asked innocently.

Ubuki reached her hand toward the necklace on her chest, and held tightly onto the golden ring which hung on it.

"The hometown that I was born at was completely different than here...A very beautiful island that's always surrounded by wind that smells like the sea."

"You were not born in Akamaki City?"

Ubuki narrowed her eyes and smiled weakly; it was their first time seeing her with that kind of expression.

"Nope...I was born on an island called Aoharima Island....."

"An island huh...It'd be nice if I can go there and see~ since the only place I knew was Ouka City."

Shiika's inadvertent words, for some reason, caused Ubuki's expression to be filled with loneliness the next second.

"...That Island...is not there anymore..."

"Eh?"

Ubuki turned her head around, and ignored Shiika's questioning.

Both Yuu and Shiika stayed in silence.

After a while, Shiika opened her mouth first and said:

"Why didn't you ask me as well, Ubuki?"

"Ask what?"

Shiika gazed straight at Ubuki who turned around with a stiffened expression.

"Up until yesterday, every one that I met would always ask me... those that came to see me secretly, and those that were brought into the facilities, they would ask --- What do you need to do in order to awaken from the Fallen status? How come Ubuki, you didn't ask me anything..."

“Do you know how?”

“I-I don’t...”

“Either way, I’m not interested in it!”

“Don’t you want to become... normal again? To be free again?”

“To be free? If I were to obtain that freedom, then there would really be nothing left of me!”

Ubuki laughed self-deprecatingly:

“I’m neither smart nor strong. If I were no longer a Mushitsuki, then I’ll become an empty shell...Even the meaning of my existence will disappear as well.”

“Why...”

Shiika showed a sorrowful expression. Upon seeing this, Ubuki narrowed her eyes.

“I don’t like that expression of yours Shiika-tan...Could you please not show it next time?”

Shiika bit her lips. Although she wanted to say something, she could only hang her head low and kept them to herself.

Within Yuu, an unspeakable uneasiness had also expanded.

Ubuki who always behaved and fussed like a child, yet would suddenly change, and show scary expressions; and Shiika who would feel moved by trivial matters, and behave out of the norm...

Are all Mushitsuki strange like these two? Are they all this hard to understand?

--- Under this kind of situation with no slightest motivation at all, would they really reach Ouka City?

Yuu held tightly onto the CD within her pocket.

“Let’s stop the chatting for now! We will move when the next green light comes! Absolutely no running or stopping, or doing any other things that make you stand out, got that?!”

Ubuki leaned her body outward from the alley, and surveyed the crossroad’s situation.

Yuu hurriedly pulled Ubuki’s sweater.

“L-Let’s... try another route! If we were to go through this many people, there’s a chance that we might be found out...!”

“Why?”

“W-What...do you mean why?! Isn’t it obviously dangerous? We should be able to find a safer route---“

“Why are you even saying that now? To us, there’s no place that’s safe to begin with, we have already put our lives on the line.”

Ubuki smiled weakly as she said that. Recalling that map of horror, Yuu felt her stomach twitching in pain.

“Right, Shiika-tan?”

Shiika nodded her head with a strange expression, while Yuu was still standing there dazedly.

“Yuu-tan, if you say anything like that next time, I’m going to punish you, got that?”

Ubuki nodded her hand against Yuu’s head as Yuu’s breathing became faster.

Ubuki and Shiika were both aware of the terror of the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau. As for Yuu, she was only starting to have a taste of this fear.

“Let’s go!”

After pedestrian traffic light changed to green, a large number of passersby began to move and disperse.

The three of them walked out from the alley, and mixed into the crowd.

The sound of cars beeping, the clamor of the passersby, and the music that was played by the traffic light— all didn’t flow into Yuu’s ears. The only thing she could hear was the sound of her heart beating violently.

Yuu lowered her head and followed Ubuki and Shiika’s steps, tailing right behind them.

However just then, she suddenly felt a gaze looking at her, hence she turned her head to the side.

“...?”

At the center of the crossroad among the crossing crowds, a petite figure stood all alone.

The figure was a girl which appeared to be in the fifth or sixth grade of elementary school. Perhaps she was in love of heart shaped patterns? She had a heart-shaped hairclip in the front of her short hair, on the necklace were four heart-shaped small accessories, she also wore a sweater with a heart-shaped picture. Other than her being cute and childish, her tidy appearance gave a strong impression.

The girl was looking at the three of them, but immediately she shifted her gaze indifferently and left in the opposite direction.

“Yuu-tann……!”

Shiika walked closer to Yuu who had subconsciously stopped walking. Yuu came back to her senses and looked ahead; Ubuki was staring at her direction.

"S-Sorry..."

Shiika held Yuu's hand, and crossed the road.

The three of them hurriedly walked into the alleys between the buildings without stopping.

After walking through consecutive corners, they arrived at the alleys of residential area.

It didn't seem like they were found out. Even after walking for a while, there still hadn't been any sign of abnormality.

"Were you not listening at all when I said you can't stop walking?"

The Ubuki that was walking in the front suddenly turned around with a disappointed expression.

"Sorry....."

Yuu originally wanted to tell them about the strange girl that she just saw, but immediately threw that idea out of her mind. That girl was not wearing a white-colored coat after all, and beside, Yuu didn't think that kind of small girl could be their enemy. If she were to speak her thoughts, Ubuki would probably say Yuu worried too much, again.

"Shiika-tan, if Yuu-tan had any of this ever again, we're gonna leave her behind! Just your clumsiness alone was enough to make me worry."

"T-This has nothing to do with Shiika-san."

"Both of you just have to listen to my orders! If it weren't for me, both Shiika-tan and Yuu-tan would've been found out already."

Ubuki turned around, and walked forward.

As if she herself was being mocked at, Yuu whispered weakly:

"That's not true... I'm also..."

"Ahaha! What nonsense is this kid talking about? You're obviously nothing but a burden."

"..."

Yuu suddenly stopped.

"Bur--den, bur--den. From today onward, your nickname will be burden-tan!"

"Ubuki...Stop saying it like that..."

"I-I'm not...a burden..."

Yuu's hoarse voice caused Ubuki to stop moving once again. She turned around, and mocked:

"Ooho...I should make myself clear then! Yuu-tan you're nothing more than baggage that we decided to take along! Take ~ along, you got that? If it weren't for the fact that Shiika-tan needed to go to Ouka City, I would've said bye-bye to you long ago. Even if you are here, you aren't helping at all!"

"I-I have money...on me...This morning's crepes were ---"

"Those were your parent's money, weren't they? And besides, if it was just money, there's other way of obtaining it. If needed to, I can just get it from passerby."

"Y-You can't do things like that...Ubuki."

"If you were to do things like that, you will immediately be found out. Can't you even understand that kind of common sense?!"

Yuu subconsciously raised her voice. This caused the smile to disappear from Ubuki's expression.

"Of course I know that...It seems like Yuu-tan is the type I hate the most! You're obviously so weak that you can't do anything on your own, yet you still think that you can do everything."

The words Ubuki said hadn't the slightest bit of tolerance in them. Yuu felt her cheeks getting hotter and hotter.

Yesterday night, Yuu's friend had also said the similar things.

"Why do I have to be spoken to like this, from you?! Ubuki-san is also the type I hate the most! I can never understand what is going on in your head—"

"Huhhh, I have no reason to stand here and take that from you either! Fine, I'm tired of being with Yuu-tan. That CD can't possibly have anything important in it anyway; were going to leave you here like this... Ah, I'm going to take back the goggles and coat, so hand over your book bag!"

"Both of you, stop!...If you keep quarreling like this, we will never be able reach Ouka City."

"It's all this midget's fault. Just being a burden was not enough, she even got in our way, what an eyesore!"

"Eyesore.....?! I'm not an eyesore! I would rather get saved by someone stronger!"

When her book bag was snatched away by Ubuki, Yuu subconsciously shouted that line.

Ubuki suddenly stopped moving, holding Yuu's book bag in her hands, and widened her eyes.

"Ubuki.....?"

Ubuki's shoulders trembled nonstop.

"I also...wanted to be stronger...If I were stronger, then...I would be able to take revenge against...that woman."

Yuu noticed that Ubuki was mumbling something to herself, before suddenly turning to face the two of them with a raging expression.

"Even if Shiika-tan and Yuu-tan were to die, I wouldn't mind at all! As long as you guys can be of use, I don't care if the two of you were to die!"

".....!"

Both Yuu and Shiika were so stunned that they couldn't speak a word.

"I've finally managed to obtain it! After waiting for 3 freaking years, I can finally take revenge against that woman now! I'm going to take revenge for (Sensei) and everyone else ---!"

"A brat's quarrel...is so annoying that I can't even stand it..."

A high-pitched voice suddenly came from above.

Unexpectedly, the first one to react among the three was Shiika. She pushed both Yuu and Ubuki away.

The place where they were just at, was carved hollow by a black shadow. As if an explosion had occurred, cements pieces were blown into pieces.

Shiika covered Yuu with her body, to shield her from the flying debris.

Yuu and Shiika raised their head to look above at the same time, and gasped.

A cloud of black mist hovered on the ceiling of a short building. Amidst the mist, a teenage girl wearing a white-colored coat could be seen.

"(Kasuou).....!"

Yuu was lifted up by Shiika.

The black shadow that carved the ground, was a giant claw formed by a part of the mist. The impact was so strong that even the wall of the housing next to it crumbled.

Shiika shifted her gaze at the sky, and became dumbfounded.

Towards the blue sky through the gaps of building, many black dots could be seen appearing in the distance.

Those are (Mushi), they must be (Kasuou)'s comrades!

--- But why...? Why is (Kasuou) here?

Yuu's feet were frozen still from fears.

According to Ubuki, (Kasuou) should be situated at the opposite direction of Higano City in Akamaki city. That was why they chose this route in the first place, in order avoid her.

Shiika and Yuu were separated from Ubuki by the crack that the claw made. Ubuki threw away the book bag, and equipped her goggles and long coat.

"...What a coincidence, (Kasuou)-tan. Shouldn't (Kasuou)-tan be situated elsewhere?"

"We've already seen through the plan that you cooked up with that empty brain of yours. You guys probably thought that you could get away by going through the areas where there weren't any strong members on guard, right?"

Ubuki expression instantly turned livid, however she immediately turned to face Shiika with a smile.

"You can't possibly forget about Shiika-tan right? Even if it's (Kasuou)-tan you, do you think you can win against her?"

The overwhelming fear that was almost crushing Yuu alive, from within, suddenly backed down a bit.

That's right, as long as we have Shiika-san, even (Kasuou) can't...

Shiika stared (Kasuou) with a nervous expression.

"(Karasu), you are really an idiot!"

(Kasuou) laughed while gazing at Shiika.

"I've already heard from (Kabuto)! (Fuyuhotaru) can't control her power right?! During the recapture mission on Christmas, even though it was her own (Mushi), she desperately tried to stop it from attacking (MinMin) and other members."

".....!"

Shiika's expression was shaken.

"Even if she were to use her power here, who you think would die first eh? At least I wouldn't get killed that easily!"

Upon hearing that, Shiika turned around to look at Yuu. Yuu was stunned.

"(Karasu), do you understand now? She has the 360 degree all range destruction type ability just like (Ladybird)! But unlike (Ladybird), she doesn't have the stamina and combat experience to place herself into effective positions! Her own existence is just like a nuke. Can't you see that "Use with Caution" warning written on her cheeks?"

Ubuki widened her eyes and looked at Yuu.

--- I-It's...my fault?...

Ubuki then shifted her gaze away from the freezing still Yuu, and faced (Kasuou) with a wry smile.

"Using cute words such as "cheeks"... (Kasuou)-tan you still haven't gotten over your old habits huh?"

"Just thinking about the fact that I won't have to see that face of yours anymore, makes me feel joy from the bottom of my heart!"

"Shiika-tan, can you please go ahead first?"

A raven dragonfly flew onto Ubuki's shoulder. Its form then began to change, releasing tentacles towards Ubuki's entire body. The long coat became two pairs of wings as the goggles changed into a pair of compound eyes. Black patterns then appeared on Ubuki's cheeks.

"Take that little one along with you as well!"

"B-But...!"

"Oi oi, did you think I would say "See ya~" and let you go just like this?!"

"Why won't you just let them go? Honor-student (Kasuou)-tan?"

"...What exactly are you thinking, (Karasu)? If (Fuyuhotaru) runs away, you won't get anything good out of it either."

"Hurry up and go, Shiika-tan! If this continues, more reinforcement may come!"

Yuu noticed sweat begin to drip down Ubuki's cheeks as she faced (Karasu). Although she maintained a smile on the exterior, Yuu knew that Ubuki was already overwhelmed by (Kasuou)'s presence.

"We can't be caught here...!"

Shiika bit her lips.

"Let's go, Yuu-chan!"

Shiika grabbed Yuu's hand, and turned her back facing Ubuki.

"But, Ubuki-san she---"

"Didn't I say I won't let you get away!"

"Why won't you just let them go?!"

Ubuki instantly accelerated, and used her body to knock away the claw that formed above Shiika and Yuu.

The claw that was deviated from its original track, narrowly missed Shiika and stabbed into the ground.

The cement road was immediately cracked open, and the fissures on the ground extended toward both Shiika and Yuu's feet.

"Yuu-chan...!"

Shiika grabbed onto Yuu's hand at the nick of time, preventing her from falling into the fissures.

Due to the strong impact, the surrounding buildings were also affected by the destruction. Yuu instantly became dumbfounded after seeing (Kasuou)'s astonishing strength.

Just then, more black-mist was released from (Kasuou). A part of the mist rapidly expended and flew straight at Yuu and Shiika. The mist then condensed into giant claw in the midair.

However Ubuki, whose wings vibrated in high speed, cut in between the two.

"Completely ignoring me? (Kasuou)-tan is really heartless huh!"

Two tentacles appeared from behind Ubuki's back, grabbed onto a fragment of a wood plank nearby and threw it at (Kasuou).

"You bastard...!"

The wood plank was effortlessly reflected by the shield of mist as a furious expression appeared onto (Kasuou)'s face.

"Weaklings should just go and die!"

Giant claws appeared one after another in the midair; Ubuki continued to narrowly dodge them.

"Ubuki-san.....!"

Pulled by Shiika, Yuu began to run as well.

"...You guys have to wait for me okay?..."

Amidst the sound of destruction, Yuu seemed to have heard the hoarse whisper of Ubuki that was almost inaudible.

2.01

Ubuki Part 2

Numerous (Mushi) descended from the sky and surrounded Ubuki, who was evading (Kasuou)'s claws.

They were the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau, Central Headquarters' --- Combat squad's third Airborne Division; the team that Ubuki belonged to up till yesterday. Aside from the Fusion type Ubuki, all other members were Minion type Mushitsuki. The coat-wearing members were riding on the backs of their flying (Mushi).

"Hooah!"

Ubuki let out a gruff shout that was unbecoming of her usual high-pitched tone.

She quickly manipulated the wings behind her back to evade with a minor rotation. The black claws that she narrowly dodged crushed the nearby building's wall along with the wire pole standing in front of it.

".....!"

However, in front of Ubuki who had dodged all the claws, countless (Mushi) had appeared; they were the Airborne Division's (Mushi) herd.

Ubuki used her body to tackle the incoming (Mushi) and flew through them.

---*Are they okay...?*

While evading, Ubuki turned to look at the direction where Shiika and Yuu ran off in.

"Weaklings should just die like how weaklings are supposed to die!"

Black claws came from directly above.

Ubuki hurriedly braked, instantly turned, and accelerated to dodge the incoming attack. However, numerous claws continually struck down from every angle one by one.

"Ugh...!"

Ubuki could not completely dodge all the claws. A sharp pain from her right leg flashed through her mind, and caused her to clench her teeth in order to maintain her focus.

--- *It's just a leg. I don't need it... I'm fine as long as I have my wings!*

Ubuki continued to dodge the claws that came one after another, as well as the Airborne Division's (Mushi)'s tackles.

It seemed like the plan to attract both (Kasuou) and the Airborne Division's attentions onto herself was quite successful. Both Shiika and Yuu should be escaping right now right?

But, setting that aside for now ---

"The power... that I worked so hard... worked so hard to obtain..."

Ubuki could feel her emotions pushing against her, almost causing her to shout out her fury.

Even though it was possible for the other two to escape pursuit safely, there was a chance that they would not return to her side. Not to mention, they did not say anything when she decided the rendezvous point to meet up in case of an emergency.

Ubuki clearly understood that she had a rather bad personality, and the fact that she was hated by both of them.

But, she just couldn't think of any other way.

If she could make them listen to her with force, then it would be much easier, but the weak Ubuki couldn't do anything like that. Because she was too weak, she could only rely on (Fuyuhotaru)'s strength; lying and giving her what she wanted in order to gain her trust. Ubuki also hated that despicable side of her, but she just could not think of anything better.

"(Sensei)... Why did someone like me... survive...?"

Ubuki murmured to herself.

However, it was not an answer that she received, but rather the claws of (Kasuou) which came straight at her.

Although Ubuki tried to get away from (Kasuou)'s attack range, the Airborne Division was blocking her way.

"Uu...!"

And before Ubuki knew it, her surroundings were filled by the ground squad's (Mushi).

They lined up in rows on the walls and roofs of the adjacent buildings, completely surrounding her.

She had no other choice but to look for a way out in the sky, or at least get away from (Kasuou)'s attack range first. Ubuki leaped and soared towards the sky.

She could feel intense wind pressure beating against her whole body.

Soon after, Ubuki's slender body flew high into the air; and in the time span of a few seconds, she flew to an altitude where she could not even discern (Kasuou)'s figure.

She paused in the air and looked below her.

Ubuki could see the Airborne Division, which had just started taking off. Whether it be the maximum velocity, acceleration, or agility; very few (Mushi) could surpass Ubuki in those areas. No matter if it was the (Mushi) or the human, none of them could really withstand the extreme gravitational force from the acceleration. This was the only advantage that Ubuki gained from fusing with her (Mushi); body enhancement.

“Even if I were to go directly to the meeting place right now I will be tracked... let’s head in the opposite direction ---“

The instant Ubuki turned her body in midair, she saw something shiny fly straight at her.

“?”

The unknown object flew past Ubuki with blinding speed. Her shoulder that was scratched by the object felt an impact as if she was being shot.

Ubuki almost lost her balance because of this, and barely managed to recover her stance.

Meanwhile, the attack continued to come straight at Ubuki, who continually displayed a nasty look.

The sharp objects that were flying at her seemed very similar to arrows, and dozens of them could be seen storming straight at her like raindrops.

Ubuki immediately climbed to a higher altitude, narrowly dodged the incoming arrows as she turned to look at the direction from which the attack came from.

On the observation deck of a soaring tower in the distance, two figures could be seen.

“(Konoha)-tan and... (Toramaru)-tan!”

Ubuki, who had been in the SEPB for over three years, could be considered one of the old timers— since most of the other Mushitsuki would either be turned into a Fallen after showing signs of maturation; or die on the battlefield. Whether she was lucky or not, but because of the fact that Ubuki was kicked into many different types of squadrons, she knew most of the members that belonged to the Central Headquarters.

(Konoha) was a member that had recently joined the SEPB; her specialty was her extremely long ranged vision. The other member, (Toramaru), was known for his extremely long ranged attacks. Although the strength of his projectiles were not as strong as (Kakkou)'s he could fire an unlimited amount of them. The team formed by these two members, had accomplished remarkable exploits, by utilizing their astonishing vision and long range attacks to search and eliminate targets.

“.....!”

(Toramaru) fired dozens of arrows once again. The arrows that were shot from the distance reappeared in front of Ubuki almost instantly.

Ubuki couldn't completely evade all the arrows, and this time her flank was wounded.

The long coat that Ubuki wore, was equipment that the SEPB especially made for their combatants; with synthetic resin fibers woven into fabric. Not only was it completely waterproof and fire-resistant, it also had the ability to withstand slashes, bullets, and other attacks. However, it was unable to completely absorb the impact; hence the reason why Ubuki could feel her flank burning in pain.

On one hand was the Airborne Division below her, which was gradually approaching, with (Kasuou) who could be seen riding atop of other people's (Mushi). On the other hand, were the other squadrons' (Mushi), which would be coming in from the distance as well.

"Sure enough the sky is the most dangerous place after all... There's no place to escape..."

Ubuki gazed dazedly at the enemies that almost surrounded her.

"(Sensei), if I were to lose this sky, would there even be any other place where I could belong...?"

Ubuki raised her head, and murmured to herself.

The glaring rays turned Ubuki's vision pure white.

The view after being dyed white began to slowly be eroded by darkness.

The movement of the air currents, the warmth from the sun, and the sound of the wind gradually faded away from Ubuki.

Amidst this pitch-black darkness, Ubuki saw her hands that were desperately trying to grab onto something.

Her pairs of hands were opened wide and flat as if they were dying to obtain something, yet they seemed so fragile as if they would immediately fall apart. And in the view ahead, there wasn't the slightest trace of light.

Ubuki slowly closed her hands.

Unable to grab onto anything, unable to take back anything, the hands that could only embrace darkness began to gradually lose its contours, before vanishing completely.

".....!"

The arrow that grazed Ubuki's cheeks caused her senses to return to the reality.

The sensation of wind could be felt once again.

--- Again that same dream... The fact that I'm seeing it at times like this... does that mean I'm near my end?...

Ubuki clenched her teeth, and focused all her attention at the wings behind her back. Her hand held onto the necklace that was hanging from her neck.

“But, if I have to die, I’d rather die with a smile. (Sensei)! I will absolutely not give my life to these guys like this!”

(Toramaru)’s arrows and (Kasuou)’s giant claws came straight at Ubuki simultaneously.

Ubuki suddenly dove down, below the reach of both attacks.

“...!”

(Kasuou), who was showing a stunned expression, exchanged glances with Ubuki at close range.

Passing through the rising Airborne Division’s (Mushi) herds, Ubuki dove straight down toward the ground.

“Don’t you dare try to get away!”

Black claws suddenly seized Ubuki’s body, clutching tightly onto Ubuki’s shoulder and abdomen as (Kasuou) fell along with Ubuki.

“(Kasuou)-tan, you’re really persistent, huh? Girls like you are more likely to be hated, you know that?”

“Shut up!”

In a blink of eye, they almost reached the ground, yet Ubuki still didn’t decrease her speed.

“Trash like you should just drop and die like this!”

“Too bad, (Kasuou)-tan you’re the only one that’s gonna drop and die!”

The instant before Ubuki almost crashed into the ground, she turned her direction with a twist spin; almost making a 90 degree turn. Black claws were spinning like bullets before peeling off from Ubuki.

“Woahhh!”

(Kasuou), who was enveloped by black clouds of mist, was thrown onto the ground, causing a loud sound akin to a meteor landing to echo throughout the surroundings.

Ubuki stopped spinning her body, and changed to a low altitude glide. (Toramaru)’s arrows continued to hail from the sky, while the Airborne Division turned to follow Ubuki up in the air.

Ubuki continued to dodge the incoming arrows as she flew onto the pedestrian sidewalks.

“W-What...?!”

“Woah!”

The surprised expressions of the passersby instantly flashed across Ubuki's view.

Ubuki stormed out of the streets of the residential area with one burst. Zigzagging through the gaps between passersby and obstacles, and flew onto the paved road next to the national highway.

Screams could be heard on the road as she flew past, since no one could possibly recognize the figure of Ubuki who flew past them with blinding speed, they could only assume that it was just some large crow or something.

Perhaps they were concerned about injuring the innocent bystanders, because the hail of arrows stopped coming at her, but there were still enemies in the sky chasing after her.

Just then, Ubuki saw a billboard in the distance and smiled.

"Bye bye, (Konoha)-tan~"

After whispering that, Ubuki dove into the stairway leading to the underground.

It was an entrance of a subway station. Within Akamaki city, there was a public subway system operated by several companies working in conjunction.

Passing through the narrow channel, Ubuki flew deeper underground. The passersby that caught a glimpse of Ubuki's figure flying extremely close to the ceiling all turned around and let out screams.

Even if it's (Konoha)-tan, there's no way she could see me here right?

Ubuki began to form a plan within her mind. After un-fusing from her (Mushi), she should be able to get away by mixing into the passengers right?

".....Ah, I don't have any money; I guess I just have to fly through it!"

Without stopping, she flew over the ticket machine. However, even though she was flying in the air, the machine could still detect Ubuki's figure, hence a loud alarm began to ring.

Ubuki ignored the staff that came rushing towards her, and flew to the platform.

The train didn't seem to be in station yet.

Ubuki flew across the tracks, and hid behind one of the platform poles.

After getting around the pole, Ubuki de-fused from her (Mushi), Tentacles instantly separated from Ubuki's body, and returned to its original form.

"Haa...Haa..."

Due to the fact that Ubuki had been flying at her full speed since the beginning, her body was already worn out from fatigue. Even though the surrounding passengers looked at her with stunned expressions, Ubuki leisurely took off her goggles and long coat.

As long as I can get into the train cars before the station staff arrive, I should be able to mix into the crowd and get away.

Suddenly, light dots began to appear in midair at the end of the tunnel.

It seemed like the train had finally come. Ubuki finally could breathe out a sigh of relief.

“Hurry up and come, my cute little train~..... Huh?”

Ubuki’s expression stiffened all of sudden.

She noticed there were four light dots hovering amidst the darkness, like the head light of an incoming car, gradually becoming bigger and bigger.

“W-Woahhh!!!”

The first one to scream was the passenger situated near the end of the platform.

The object that appeared out of the tunnel was not the train, but rather a giant (Mushi) with four huge eyes on its head. Its upside-down triangular wings made it seem very similar to a caddisfly. A goggle-wearing figure could also be seen riding on top of it.

Four huge compound eyes were staring straight at Ubuki.

“Woah... (Yotsume)-tan... Isn’t Higano City your jurisdiction...?”

She muttered dazedly as she put on her goggles and long coat. The raven dragonfly appeared, turning itself into tentacles and fused with Ubuki’s body once again.

“Ahh! Monster!”

Just at that instant, another scream could be heard from the stairway that Ubuki came from.

“Even (Ashitaka)-tan is here... They are actually sending two high-mobility elites to chase after me? What the hell is going on?!”

The monster that appeared from the stairway was a ten-limbed long-legged (Mushi). It was moving with its whole body upside-down, stabbing its legs into the ceiling. Although the number of legs was different, its figure looked very similar to a water strider. There was a white-coat wearing figure inside its streamlined body.

Ubuki beat her wings and flew into the air. Both the caddisfly and the water strider came charging straight at her simultaneously.

Since the stairway was blocked, Ubuki had no other choice but to fly onto the tracks.

Relying on the afterglow of the emergency lights that flashed by, Ubuki flew deeper into the dim narrow tunnel. The flashing lights coming from (Yotsume)’s (Mushi)’s eyes were tailing her from behind.



The underground air was filled with the rusty smell of metal. Taking a breath of the damp breeze, Ubuki showed an unhappy look.

“The smell of the air here stinks... I will never fly underground again!”

While complaining about the quality of the air, Ubuki suddenly remembered something.

Even without reconfirmation, it was clear that Ubuki was one of the lower ranks of the Headquarters. On the other hand, (Kasuou), (Yotsume), (Ashitaka), and others were all classified as high-ranked elites.

The news of Ubuki parting ways with (Fuyuhotaru) should’ve been reported by (Kasuou) already. If so, then why were they still mobilizing such high-ranked members to chase after Ubuki?. Especially considering the events that had just transpired; the fact that they exposed their (Mushi) in front of the general public, had never happened.

After almost crashing into the bumpy wires, Ubuki set her questioning of the SEPB's strange acts aside and focused more on her flying. The vision underground was extremely awful, and even the flow of the air currents weren't evident; hence Ubuki could not use her maximum speed at will. Taking a glimpse behind her, she could see that the (Mushi) in pursuit had almost caught up to her.

The first one that attacked Ubuki was (Ashitaka).

(Ashitaka) manipulated the ten legs with a blinding speed that one could barely get a glimpse of, and moved onto the wall next to Ubuki. It raised its sharp legs akin to needles, before stabbing it at Ubuki who was illuminated by (Yotsume)’s flashing light.

“Tch...!”

Ubuki immediately curled up her body to dodge the attack.

However, (Ashitaka) did not stop just there. He continued to move onto the ceilings, the tracks, and other walls to attack her from all angles.

Ubuki was desperately dodging the attacks by swiveling her body. She would also fly onto the opposite tracks to evade the attacks from time to time. Because the space for movement was limited, Ubuki was forced to do some extremely dangerous evasive actions. With her current speed, even if it was just a slight scratch against the wall, it could make Ubuki completely lose her balance.

“That’s why I hate crowded spaces like this!”

Just then, the quad compound-eyed caddisfly finally caught up to Ubuki. It reached out two of its front legs, in attempting to seize Ubuki; the giant mouthpart on its abdomen was wriggling nonstop.

(Ashitaka)’s needle legs continued to storm down from all angles while (Yotsume)’s mandible was closing in on her. The only escape route Ubuki had left was the path in front of her.

“Haa...Haa...”

Because of the constant evasion, large droplets of sweat began to appear on Ubuki's forehead.

Just then, a faint light appeared in front of her; Ubuki could see a fork in the track leading into two tunnels.

In addition, Ubuki also felt a slight change in air current.

"If you wanna play tag this badly... then you better keep up with me!"

Ubuki accelerated faster towards the intersection. The enemies behind could not tell which way she was going to go.

An instant before she crashed into middle divider, Ubuki swiveled her body while changing her direction and performed the famous aerobatic "Barrel Roll". She cut into the left lane of the fork and glided.

"...!"

The Airborne Division who could not change their direction in time charged straight into the other lane, while many emergency-braked.

"Tch...!"

Ubuki heard the sound of (Ashitaka) sucking his teeth. He seemed to have barely managed to catch up to Ubuki, but (Yotsume) wasn't as lucky; his enormous body completely crashed into the middle wall. The sound of walls shattering echoed throughout the tunnel.

But even so, (Yotsume) didn't stop right there. Even though half of its body was stuck in the wall, it still didn't give up on chasing after Ubuki.

"...(Yotsume)-tan is a really hard worker huh..."

Just at that instant, a light different from (Yotsume)'s flashing light appeared in front of Ubuki in the distance.

"But, it seems like your crisis didn't end just yet!"

Accompanied by a loud and heavy sound, strong wind pressure stormed straight at Ubuki and others.

It was a running subway train.

"Mmn...!"

The instant before Ubuki crashed into the train, she cut into the gap between the wall and the train.

Groans could be heard coming from behind; it seemed like they were not able to get away in time. Ubuki saw (Yotsume)'s (Mushi) sent flying into the wall by the train.

The time it took for the train to pass by lasted only a few seconds. Amidst the storming air currents, Ubuki desperately tried to maintain her flying balance, while flying in between the several inch gap between the wall and the train. The train's whistle rang throughout the tunnel; Ubuki could feel her eardrums about to rupture from the deafening echo.

Accompanied by another set of gusts, the train had completely passed by her.

Ubuki, who safely escaped the danger of being crushed alive by the train, showed an expression of relief. However ---

“Ugh!...”

A sharp pain ran through Ubuki's left arm. Her body began to lose balance because of this, and caused her to spin out of control.

“Ahh!”

Her back crashed into the wires of the ceiling, but thanks to it, her body stopped spinning. Ubuki somehow managed to spread her wings and stabilized her balance before completely crashing into the ground.

“Damn it, how annoying...!”

The one who had attacked Ubuki was the (Ashitaka) who was clinging to the wall. It seemed like Ubuki wasn't the only one who had lived through.

“Haha!”

Although Ubuki wanted to bitch at him, she was unable to sound a word from the pain.

She stared sharply at (Ashitaka) with her teary eyes.

In this tunnel, it seemed (Ashitaka)'s mobility had the upper hand. Ubuki had completely lost the speed advantage she had over him.

Ubuki accelerated faster while looking at the ceiling.

In her view, countless thick cable wires could be seen.

These wires are serious eyesores. Not only did they make the tunnel even narrower, they also pop out of nowhere from time to time!

However, because of this, an idea emerged in Ubuki's mind.

“Water striders should just play in water like how they're supposed to!”

Ubuki showed an arrogant smile as she looked at (Ashitaka)'s face.

“What did you just say?!”

“I’ve been wanting to ask you this for a long time already... (Ashitaka)-tan, did you know that your (Mushi) always smells like moss?! Moss~ Moss~ it stinks~ Ahaha.”

Ubuki turned her neck a bit and showed a mischievous grin, known as “the troll face”, while continuing to make fun of him.

“The SEPB’s weakest weakling dares to act so cocky and mock me...?! I’m going to slaughter you!”

(Ashitaka)’s expression, after being provoked by Ubuki, was filled with rage.

Using all the remaining strength she had left, Ubuki desperately dodged (Ashitaka)’s raging attacks from the needle-like legs.

“Moss~ Moss~ Moss~ you stinks~”

“Shut the fuck up!”

Ubuki evaded through the attacks that came at her like rain drops, and flew closely to the ceiling.

“If the trains were to stop, remember to ask the SEPB to pay for the compensation!”

“Huh, what the hell are you saying?”

(Ashitaka)’s (Mushi) aimed before stabbing its leg straight at Ubuki’s head.

However, Ubuki twisted her body the instant before the needle-like leg reached her. The needle-like leg grazed past Ubuki’s cheeks and stabbed into the cable wires of the ceiling.

The cable wires immediately sparked blue and white embers, and enveloped (Ashitaka) and his (Mushi) completely.

“AHHHH!!!”

(Ashitaka)’s whole body curled into a bow shape, and dropped onto the floor from his (Mushi). The figure of (Ashitaka) bouncing on the tracks until he hit a wall flashed through the corner of Ubuki’s eyes.

“Woahh, he really got electrocuted... This is why I hate this kind of humid air!”

Because (Ashitaka) was constantly exposed to this kind of humid atmosphere, a large amount of moisture most likely accumulated onto him. This occurrence along with the fact that he cut into a high-voltage cable, resulted in the electric current running through his body.

After the disappearance of (Ashitaka)’s figure, the underground tunnel regained its silence once again. It seemed like the severance of the cable caused the trains to stop running.

Ubuki gradually decreased her flight velocity, and landed onto the track. But because of the overwhelming fatigue, she was unable to land perfectly and fell into a roll on the tracks.

“Haa...Haa...”

Ubuki climbed up, and raised her head. A raven dragonfly de-fused from her body, which was covered in wounds.

“So it takes this much for a weakling to run away eh...”

There was a stairway at the end of the tunnel. Perhaps it was used for the train’s maintenance? The stairway extended all the way to the ground above.

Ubuki suddenly heard a sobbing sound, only to find out that the sound was coming from her herself; the tears that she had been holding finally dripped onto the ground.

“Ehh? Araa... Why am I crying...?”

While walking up the stairs, Ubuki used the corner of her dirty long coat to wipe away the tears.

"(Sensei), I've known that I'm weak for a long time now... I'm already used to it... I'm not lying! That's why—"

A door that was overflowing with light from around its gaps appeared.

In front of the door, Ubuki stopped.

What would be waiting for Ubuki once she opened this door and walked out? Although the ones that were waiting for Ubuki...had already disappeared three years go— not a single one of them lived... Would there still be anyone waiting for Ubuki? And even if Ubuki were to die in this tunnel filled with the smell of rusted metal... Would there still be anyone who would cry or feel sad for her?...

Shiika and Yuu had probably escaped by now right? Why would they want to return to Ubuki who had tried to use them?

“I want to... go back to the Island... (Sensei)... Without that island, my dream would be meaningless...”

Ubuki leaned against the wall, and walked up to the door.

“But, I’m not planning on disappearing alone just like this... (Sensei)...”

To the current Ubuki, the memories of her hometown could generate nothing but hatred.

“I’ll take that woman along with me... Before I kill her, I’ll live on, no matter what happens!”

Ubuki opened the door, and left the tunnel.

There was an embankment next to the riverbank outside of the tunnel. It seemed like there was an abandoned car factory up ahead; large numbers of disposed rusty cars could be seen piling up like mountains around. And there was a giant hoist crane with a car hanging from it parked on the side.

Ubuki suddenly smiled.

“Ahaha... You made a special trip here to wait for me? I’m really happy...”

That was what Ubuki felt from the bottom of her heart. She couldn't even imagine within her dream, that there actually existed a person waiting for her. Within Ubuki's heart, a joy unbefitting of the current atmosphere emerged.

Standing on the top of car piles, a blond-haired teenage girl could be seen.

“I can’t stand to be underestimated by people this much... Let’s finish this once and for all, (Karasu).”

Facing the sunset with her back, (Kasuou) showed a snooty grin.

2.02

Shiika Part 2

Holding Yuu's hand, Shiika ran through the narrow alley.

Her body was feeling heavy.

Because of the fact that she had been imprisoned within the facilities for such a long time, her physical body condition had plunged. It wasn't long before her chest began to feel pain, and having trouble breathing.

It hurts.

Four years ago, as well as the Christmas two months ago were also the same. It was the same pain and fear that Shiika had experienced back then.

Run away after being caught, and then run away again after being caught.

It felt as if Shiika was repeating the whole process.

--- Daisuke-kun.....

The figure of the teenage boy, whom she had promised to meet again, began to surface within Shiika's mind.

--- I want to see you.....

Shiika bit her lips.

The teenage boy who harbored the same dream --- Kusuriya Daisuke, had said that he wanted to see Shiika once more. His words, and the promise made between them, had become the only thing that supported her until now, making her able to endure the loneliness of this two month period.

But under the current situation, she definitely cannot go see him.

Even if she were to meet him right now, it would only repeat what happened two months ago. Even if Shiika were to see Daisuke, it would only give him trouble.

She only thought about escaping the facility to take back Rina's drawing.

But Shiika did not think about, after taking back the drawing, what's she going to do next?

Ubuki seemed to have wanted Shiika to help her do something, and Shiika hoped to help her as much as possible.

But then, what's next after that...?

Without any goal.

After bidding the last farewell to her family, and lost her most precious friend, Rina.

What could Shiika do next?

The Shiika now had nothing. The only thing that she had left... was a promise that she couldn't even consider as a hope... a tiny promise that she made with a teenage boy.

"Haa...Haa..."

Raising her head, she could see numerous (Mushi) flying up above.

"H-Hide...!"

Shiika pushed Yuu against the wall, and hid under the shade of a tree. They held their breath for a while before looking up once again.

The (Mushi) herd that was still up in the air didn't seem to have a slightest intention of leaving.

"We've been found out... Ubuki-san she... (Kasuou)..."

Yuu's body was trembling, hiding tightly behind Shiika with a terrified expression.

Shiika shook away her depression.

It's still too early to talk about what to do next.

Shirakashi Ubuki.

Ebina Yuu.

They were the two companions that she had encountered; the Shiika now was not alone anymore.

I need to get the three of us out of this predicament first.

"Ah..."

Yuu took a look behind them and let out a low scream.

Following Yuu's gaze, Shiika also turned around to take a look, and saw the figures of white-attired people flashing by.

Shiika and Yuu held each other's hands, and hid in the alley next to them.

The two of them ran through the labyrinth-like alleys of residential buildings. After running for a while, they stopped once again.

"Again...!"

At the corner where they were about to turn, they saw the figures of white-attired people again.

The two of them could only turn back, and look for a different route.

“They are also here ---“

On the roof of a nearby building, figures could be seen patrolling with their (Mushi).

“Yuu-chan, over here...”

There was a low wall at the end of the alley.

They climbed over the wall with great effort, and walked deeper into the dark alley. Even though it was a dark alley that was filled with the disgusting smell of the garbage littered all around, there wasn’t any sign of people.

The two of them stopped running, and took a breath. The smell of garbage was making them lock their eyebrows.

It seemed like this area was completely surrounded.

Not to mention ---

“We’re getting further and further away from Ouka City...”

Yuu whispered in a desperate tone.

What Yuu said was correct. While in the process of evading the pursuers, they were pushed onto a route that was completely the opposite direction of the escape route that they have had in mind.

“Even though we have to be at Ouka City the day after tomorrow...”

Yuu dropped onto the ground and began to cry.

It had been a long time since noon; the shadows on the ground were becoming longer and longer. Before long, the sun would completely set and day would turn into night right?

Setting aside getting out of Akamaki City aside for now, the two of them were even getting further away in the opposite direction of Ouka City from the spot where they met. How could they ever get out of Akamaki City, and pass through Higano City within two days?

“W-What should we do...What should we do...?”

Yuu held tightly onto the CD that she took from her pocket.

Shiika was also feeling the same anxiousness. Although their situation was pretty bad, but without a doubt, Ubuki’s situation was probably even worse than ---

“!”

Both Shiika and Yuu twitched their bodies in shock.

It was because a sharp music sound suddenly rang throughout the dark alleys.

“W-What is that...?”

A music that was played in an electronic monotonous tone was coming from the ground covered in garbage.

“Crawling Life...?”

Yuu murmured to herself as Shiika turned her head around to look at her.

“This is the song of the very popular music group, “Crawling Life”. But why is it ---“

“Ah.....”

Shiika noticed the flashing light on the ground.

“Cell phone?...”

It was a foldable cell phone; the music seemed to have come from it as a ringtone.

Shiika exchanged glances with Yuu.

--- *Why is there a cell phone here...?*

While the two of them were standing still, unsure of what to do, the music continued to ring.

“ ... ”

Shiika timidly reached her hand towards the cell phone. The Yuu behind her didn't intend on stopping her.

The cell phone had the same model as the one that Rina used. Shiika picked up the cell phone, and moved it closer to her ear.

“H-Hello...?”

“Please calmly listen to what I have to say, (Fuyuhotaru).”

“...!”

Shiika almost dropped the cell phone onto the ground from shock.

There wasn't any introduction or greeting from the other end of the call, just words that were spoken in a bland tone. It was a girl's calm voice that had a slight childish tone in it.

“You guys are almost surrounded in all directions by them. Please listen to my instructions, I’ll help you guys get out of Akamaki City.”

Yuu also moved closer to the cell phone to listen to the girl’s voice; the two of them were speechless from shock.

“W-Who are you...?”

“...Please call me Erii. (Fuyuhotaru), please get out of Akamaki City as soon as possible. The neighboring Kurohishi City should be safer than here.”

Yuu grabbed onto Shiika’s wrist. Her expression was filled with vigilance toward this situation.

“Why are you...helping us?”

“Do you doubt that this is a trap? It’s up to you if you want to follow, but if this keeps on, you guys will definitely be found by the members of the Central Headquarters right?”

Shiika could not refute Erii’s words.

“First, please immediately leave your current position. The combat squad’s members would be patrolling there really soon.”

“...!”

Yuu suddenly moved her body back, which caused Shiika to look at her surprised.

“That cell phone... has no battery...!”

Flipping the cell phone around, the spot where the battery was supposed to be was empty.

“Please hurry up and move east...!”

Erii’s voice suddenly became sharp.

“...”

Shiika was baffled for an instant, but immediately started moving eastward.

“Shiika-san...!”

Yuu hurriedly followed after Shiika.

Perhaps this might be a trap.

But if it goes on like this, it would be just like what Erii had said; it would only be a matter of time before we were caught.

After walking out from the dark alleys, a deserted road filled with shops lining up side by side next to each other appeared into their view. At the other side of the rusty arch bridge, a wide road where cars were passing by could be seen.

"If I had such intention, I would have leaded you toward the direction of pursuers. So now, do you trust me a bit?"

"How did you ---?"

"It doesn't matter how I did it. More importantly, please immediately escape Akamaki City right now. I'll safely guide you to the neighboring Kurohishi City."

"B-But....."

"I can understand your hatred towards the Central Headquarters, but right now you need to get to somewhere safe as soon as possible ---"

"My hatred towards the Central Headquarters...?"

Shiika frowned.

"...Could it be...that you have not seen the content of the CD?"

Erii asked in a surprised tone.

"Why would I hate the Central Headquarters? What does this CD has to do with me?..."

"..."

Erii became silent.

A strange uneasiness arose from within Shiika.

---Why...does she think I would hate the Central Headquarters...?

However, Erii ignored Shiika's questioning.

"...Currently, there are total of 5 high-ranked members participating in the mission of recapturing (Fuyuhotaru), as well as the recovery of the CD. (Kasuou), (Konoha), (Toramaru), (Ashitaka), and (Yotsume)..... As time goes on, more and more combatants that were out on missions would gather here. The path to Kurohishi City is the only route left that would not come in contact with them."

"T-That won't work...! We have to be there at Ouka City the day after tomorrow---"

"Ouka City?"

There was a slight confusion mingled in Erii's voice. After a short silence, she continued to speak:

"(Fuyuhotaru).....Why would you still want to go to Ouka City now, after all that ---?"

“ ... ”

Shiika did not answer. Yuu was also in silent.

Perhap she had felt the strong determination in their silence, Erii didn't push them any further with the topic.

“...Please listen carefully to what I'm going to say next. You guys should be able to see the national highway from your current location right? First of all, please run to the national highway, and then advance eastward.”

“But if we were to do that, we would be getting further away from Ouka City!”

Yuu shouted with a loud voice, yet Erii continued onward with her calm tone:

“After running for a while, you guys should be able to see a subway train station. Please don't stop, just run straight into the subway.”

“Subway?”

“Even though the Inspector squad would be waiting there, please ignore them and just charge. You have to arrive there in the next 3 minutes and 20 seconds.”

Shiika and Yuu exchanged glances with each other.

“More combatants are gathering near you. If you were to make it into the train, they would not be able to catch up to you. Get off at the next station after you get on the train, and then immediately leave the station with haste. This way, you would be able to arrive near the border of Higano City.”

“...!”

“Please pick up the pace, there's only 2 minutes and 45 seconds left, run!”

After a sharp urging sound, the connection was cut off.

Both Shiika and Yuu took a deep breath.

There was no time to hesitate.

The two of them started running through the streets, rushing toward the national highway and immediately heading eastward after that.

“Ah...!”

The Yuu who turned her head around to take a look sounded a cry filled with fear.

Numerous black shadows appeared from the sky; the figures of (Mushi).

After noticing the running figures of Shiika and Yuu, the (Mushi) that were flying in the sky began to chase after them.

“Yuu-chan...!”

Grabbing onto the wrist of Yuu who had almost stopped running, Shiika continued to run ahead. The passersby would turn their head around to gaze surprised at the teenage girls that ran past them in full speed.

Just then, the subway station’s billboard and stairway appeared ahead.

The two of them ran down the stairs without taking a break.

After arriving to the station underground, a group of people suddenly turned their heads around. Upon seeing the figures of Shiika and Yuu charging straight towards the wickets, they immediately put on their white goggles.

---*Inspector squad...!*

They were the enemies that Shiika had encountered many times before. Inspector squad members usually disguised themselves as normal civilians, and monitor their mission from their daily life.

Following Erii’s instruction, Shiika and Yuu ran toward the wickets. They could see the train had already come into the platform and was gradually slowing down.

“W-What about...our tickets?!”

Yuu asked confusedly.

Shiika didn’t answer her question, just continued to run toward the wickets. The goggles-wearing figures were gradually approaching them.

Just then, with a loud *Gadong* sound, the automatic wickets opened in front of them. Of course, neither Shiika nor Yuu had put in a ticket.

“Eh...W-Why did it...?”

Right after Shiika and Yuu passed through the wickets, the wickets immediately closed up. The goggles-wearing figures that were chasing after them were a step behind, and crashed into the wickets.

At the same time, the music that notified the passengers that the train was about to leave the station began to ring.

--- *Almost there...!*

Harboring feelings similar to prayer, they dashed towards the train at full speed.

“Ah...!”

However, Yuu crashed into a passenger by their shoulders, which caused the CD that she was holding in her hands to drop onto the floor.

“Yuu-chan!”

“.....!”

Yuu was hesitating between the train that was about to take off and the CD that fell onto the floor, but after biting her lips, she immediately went for the CD on the floor.

“Hurry...!”

Shiika grabbed Yuu’s wrist and ran for the train door.

However, the time Yuu spend to pick up the CD became their fatal crux.

In front of the running Shiika and Yuu, the train door closed.

“...!”

Shiika, who was late by a few seconds, banged her hands at the closed train door.

The train slowly began to move.

“Why...”

They couldn’t make it in time ---

Shiika and Yuu turned around to look behind them.

The goggles-wearing figures were gradually approaching the two of them.

“...! Shiika-san!”

The sound of air escaping suddenly rang.

Because of Yuu’s shouting, Shiika turned around to look, and saw that there was a door open on one of the latter cars of the train. The opened door was about to pass where Shiika and Yuu were at.

“...!”

The fact that the two of them had successfully jumped into the train could almost be considered a miracle. If there were a slight mistake in timing, they would definitely suffer serious injuries from colliding against the train.

The train door immediately closed up after they jumped in; the figures of those white-goggled enemies were gradually fading away in a distant.

“Haa...Haa...”

While panting heavily, the two of them stood up.

The surrounding passengers were looking at them with astonished eyes. Seeing someone jumping onto a moving train, of course it would be normal for them to have such reactions.

“L-Let’s go to the other cars...”

Before they could calm down their breathing, Shiika pulled Yuu’s hand and moved to a forward car.

Even though they almost missed the train, they somehow managed to make it through and escape from the pursuers.

The fact that the wicket opened automatically even without a ticket, and the door of a running train suddenly opened up...had no doubt saved them. Those were probably the acts of that girl called Erii right? The two of them began to accept this fact within their hearts.

After walking forward for about two cars, the two of them leaned their bodies against the train’s wall. Raising their heads to gaze at the ceiling, they began to slow down their breathing.

“I’m sorry...”

Yuu apologized with a hoarse voice as she held tightly onto the CD, and lowered her head.

“I’ve caused you a lot of trouble...I’m sorry, Shiika-san.....”

The Yui who was apologizing began to tremble her shoulders slightly. Perhaps the fear from almost being caught had caused her to feel extremely scared.

Shika then remembered the words that Ubuki had once said.

--- Do you think you can afford to take the responsibility?

To the Yui who was a normal junior high student yesterday, presumably the current situation would be unbearable for her right? She should be more uneasy and scared than Shiika could ever imagine right?

“Yuu-chan...Let me deliver the CD to (Kakkou)-kun for you...”

Yui widened her eyes.

“So...I’m really a burden...after all huh?”

With an expression near to tears, Yui grabbed onto Shiika’s clothes.

“Since I couldn’t do anything to help... Shiika-san you’re actually very strong right? But because of me by your side, you couldn’t ---”

“I’m not strong... Not strong at all...”

The cement walls outside of the train's window flashed by at a blinding speed. A strong wind resulted from passing by an opposite train was shaking the train.

"I have thought about it many times before... If I can become stronger... If I can... obtain the strength to not lose to my (Mushi), then I might not hurt as many people as before. And I might even be able to save Rina... But I'm just someone – that has seen more people getting hurt than others."

Up till now, there had been numerous people who'd fallen in front of Shiika.

Some of them, before they fell, would give Shiika a push. While some of them cursed nonstop at Shiika before their dreams faded away. Those that hurt Shiika, as well as those that protected Shiika, Shiika could only see them to the end, unable to do anything for them.

"I don't want to hurt anyone anymore... If it weren't for Yuu-chan, I might be hurting a lot of people right now..."

Shiika gazed straight at Yuu's face, and continued:

"But, Yuu-chan you have those that you hold precious right? There are still people waiting for Yuu-chan to come home right?... If you were to fall to any danger, I'm sure those people would be sad."

Yuu's expression was shaken, just like what Shiika had said; she had a lot of things that she held precious right?

"I'm sure the guy called (Centi) would be very happy to know there was someone that received his final will... Even if Yuu-chan only accepted his will, it must have meant something just as great. That's why... Even if you chose to entrust this will onto us right now, I'm sure he would be able to accept it. This way, Yuu-chan, you don't have to go through all these dangers."

Yuu's hands were trembling nonstop as she took out the CD from her pocket.

"I...I-I..."

Yuu slowly handed the CD towards Shiika.

"Mm."

Shiika smiled as she reached her hand towards the CD.

However, the instant before Shiika could touch the CD; Yuu took it back, holding it against her chest.

Under her glasses, large droplets of tears began to fall.

"I can't..."

"...Eh?"

"I know that dad, mom, and my friends are worrying about me... and I'm actually very scared right now; I wanted to go home right away. B-But I just can't give it up... I don't even know why myself, could it be that I'm really hypnotized just like what Ubuki-san had said?"

Yuu held tightly onto the CD against her chest.

"That's why I have to do it... Because, I was the one that accepted (Centi)'s will... T-That's why... I have to deliver it..."

Gazing at the teenage girl that was desperately explaining, Shiika smiled weakly.

Looking at Yuu-chan now, is it wrong for me to feel happy?

Shiika suddenly recalled what happened four years ago, the moment when she was about to lose her life, from her dream being devoured by her (Mushi).

(Kakkou)-kun...

The teenage boy who also harbored the same dream, and accepted Shiika's will --- (Kakkou).

How's he doing right now...?

She knew that he was a very prudent, strong-willed teenage boy.

She also wanted to see him again.

If I could see (Kakkou)-kun again, I'll definitely apologize properly this time ---

Because of the fact that Shiika had escaped the facilities, he would probably receive the capture mission of (Fuyuhotaru) for the 3rd time.

But for some reason, Shiika wasn't afraid of him.

(Kakkou)-kun, every time I've caused you a lot of trouble, I'm really sorry about that ---

Within her heart, Shiika apologized quietly to the (Kakkou) who harbored the same dream as her.

"I-I...want to have a place where I belong, a place of belonging that accepts me; allows me to stay."

Shiika's sudden words caused Yuu to feel perplexed.

"That is my dream."

"Shiika-san's...dream?"

"A precious dream that I won't forget no matter what I have to go through, no matter how much that I want to run away... Yuu-chan, are you scared right now?"

Upon being asked by Shiika, even though she was confused, she still nodded her head in response.

“Do you want to run away?”

Although still puzzled, Yuu shook her head left and right.

“Do you have something that you absolutely can’t let go, can’t forget even when you’re this scared, and wanting to run away?”

Yuu suddenly remembered something, and gazed at the CD that she was holding in her hands before strengthening her grip.

“I wanted to deliver this... I wanted to deliver this to (Kakkou)-san... with my own hands.”

“What’s so special about Mushitsuki’s dream? I’m sure what Yuu-chan received, wasn’t just a CD.”

Shiika gazed straight at Yuu. Although Yuu had a wonky look, she still firmly nodded her head.

Just then, the surrounding passengers became noisy.

“Did something just fly pass by?”

“What was that? Something black, like a bird.....”

“Look! There’s something bigger over there ---“

“.....?”

Both Shiika and Yuu raised their head.

Just at that instant, a music sound came from Shiika’s hands. It was the same ringtone that came from the cell phone before.

The two of them stood near the end of the car, and put the cell phone closer to their ears. The passengers were glaring at them with blaming looks on their faces. Shiika apologized lightly to them with a whisper.

“S-Sorry...”

“You guys were almost caught by them, you know that right? Do you really wish to get away?”

From the other end of the call suddenly came a scolding from a little girl.

Yuu showed a displeased expression.

“Were you the one that saved us?”

“You are almost there at the next station. Please get ready...is what I want to say, but some problems had occurred.”

“Eh?”

“At the end of the cars, a couple Inspector squads’ members had boarded the train. They are moving toward your whereabouts.”

Shiika and Yuu were speechless.

“The train might not make it in time to the station before they come... But if it did, then (Fuyuhotaru) you need to immediately---“

The connection suddenly cut off.

“...!”

The train’s lights had blacked out as well.

After the car instantly turned into pitch dark, weak fluorescent lights began to light up. It must be the train’s emergency lightings.

At the same time, the cell phone that Shiika was holding onto sparked blue white glows. Amidst the light that showed a figure similar to a butterfly, an English alphabet “C” could be seen surfacing on its wings.

The instant the surroundings darkened, the figure of the butterfly that appeared onto the cell phone had vanished as well.

“H-Hello? Erii??”

The cell phone that lost its glow became silent. No matter how many times they tried to talk through the phone, there was no response from the girl at all.

Within the train, the notice “Due to an unknown blackout, the train will be temporarily making a stop here” was being broadcasted.

The train that was running slowly came to a complete stop.

“W-What should we do now, Shiika-san...?! She said they would be here really soon...!”

Yuu grabbed Shiika’s wrist as Shiika gazed at the train’s door.

There was an emergency button next to the train’s door; a device that allowed passengers to open the door manually in case of emergency.

“.....”

The two of them exchanged glances with each other for an instant.

Right after that, Yuu rushed toward the door, and pressed the emergency button.

Under the gaze of the surrounding passengers, the two of them worked together to slide open the train's door. The unique smell of underground air that had a mix of rust and moisture began to pour into the car.

The two of them then jumped down from the car.

“Shiika-san, over there ---!”

The tunnel was completely enveloped in darkness.

“Hurry! Before the Inspector squad arrives, we have to get out of here from there!”

Shiika gazed at the direction where Yuu was pointing at.

At the end of the underground tunnel, a station platform could be seen in the distance in front of the train.

Ubuki Part 3

Aoharima Island was an island with a population of no more than 300 people.

Ubuki, who was born on Aoharima Island, had lived with nature ever since she was little.

Her father was a fisherman. Almost all of the residents of Aoharima Island were either fishermen or farmers at that time, in addition to a few public service facilities.

Her mother seemed to have come from outside of the island. As to how her parents met, no matter who she asked, no one would answer her.

When Ubuki was still in her mother's belly, her father died from an accident when he went out fishing. Shortly after, her mother passed away after giving birth to Ubuki due to an illness.

However, Ubuki did not suffer a lonely childhood due to this.

Aside from Ubuki, there were three other children on the island that shared similar situations and had become orphans. They all lived together in a welfare agency. Among the four non-blood related siblings, Ubuki was the youngest. Ubuki was raised and milk-fed by her older brothers and sisters. Although she often argued with her older siblings, it was always the stubborn Ubuki who won in the end. The smallest Ubuki was often spoiled by her brothers and sisters as well.

Ubuki was neither discriminated nor bullied by her classmates. Because the school only had a few dozen students, everyone had to get along with each other. But thinking back on it now, it must've been because of her older siblings' merits right? It was because they were always so well-behaved and helpful, that other people were willing to stand the vexatious Ubuki.

Ubuki was particularly fond of Aoharima Island's summer; the warm yet cool climate, and the fresh sea. Due to the fact that there were no beaches on the island, there weren't any visitors that came to sightsee. However, if one were to climb up the hills, they could catch a glance of the island, the fishing boats nearby, and the ocean as a whole.

I want to stay on this island forever ---

It was natural that Ubuki would have such a dream. Although many residents wanted to leave the island and go out to see the world, Ubuki was not interested in the slightest by the world outside of Aoharima Island.

The first encounter between Ubuki and (Sensei) happened during Ubuki's first year of Junior High.

After taking her usual stroll up the hill, she saw a young man standing directly in front of her. His messy hair was being blown by the gentle breeze. She originally thought that he was a hobo, but after thinking

carefully, she concluded that a hobo wouldn't possibly take a ship and travel to a deserted island such as this right?

"What are you doing?"

Ubuki walked closer to the unsuspecting young man and sat next to him.

"I'm looking for beautiful dreams..."

The young man didn't seem surprised by the sudden visitor; instead he lowered his head to look at Ubuki, and smiled:

"How about you? What are you doing here?"

Ubuki was unhappy upon being asked. Since this place was her favorite spot, she didn't want to be disturbed by a sudden interloper like this.

"I'm looking for beautiful wind and sea!"

Imitating the young man's words, Ubuki replied. The young man immediately smiled wryly:

"Is that so... Am I bothering you then?"

"Mhm, you're an eyesore."

"...Aha... Would it be better if I apologize to you?"

"Mhm, apologize to me."

"I'm sorry..."

"..."

"I wish to stay here a little longer, can I?"

"No."

"...You're really harsh eh..."

The young man scratched his head; it didn't seem like he intended to leave any time soon. Perhaps, he wanted to tease Ubuki? He suddenly turned around and gazed straight at Ubuki with a mischievous expression.

"It'd be best if you stay away from me!"

"Why?"

"Because I... will eat the dreams of those around me!"

“Oho---“

“...Just Oho, that’s it? Is that all you have to say?”

The young man was a new doctor sent over by the mainland and he resided in the clinic of one of the public facilities.

Although the islanders were very kind to those that were born on the island, they were downright cold toward foreigners. Aside from his patients, he was never seen with any other people outside of the clinic. Ubuki was probably the only one that would go and chill with him during free time.

“Good afternoon, (Sensei).”

Of course, the young man had a name, but for some reason Ubuki only called him by “Sensei”.

“Ah, a flower! Why is there a flower here?”

“A patient gave it to me.....is what I would like to say, but I actually found it on the hill. Aha~”

“So pretty~ How come flowers are so pretty?”

“That’s because they want you to look at them!”

“Really...?”

“Just kidding, they actually don’t want people to look at them...”

“...Then what is it?”

“Well, that’s their scheme; to make you to take an interest in them, so that you can help them transport pollen.”

“...I’m getting more and more confused about what you are trying to say!”

“In other words, the flower has no consciousness of itself. If it were to say this is their scheme, then I wouldn’t need to worry about this when picking flowers,”

(Sensei) gazed at Ubuki while saying that. Ubuki, who completely did not understand a word he just said, was tilting her head and pondering:

"It's because (Sensei) always says these kinds of hard to understand things that you aren't able to get along with the other people here!"

In response to Ubuki’s remark, (Sensei) replied with a smile.

“That’s okay. I’m fine being just like this.”

A few months after (Sensei) arrived at the island, Ubuki obtained another little secret.

It was about a strange raven dragonfly-creature that appeared around her all the time.

This insect-like creature gave Ubuki the ability to fly in the sky. Although Ubuki didn't understand what was going on, she knew that this was abnormal. Hence she didn't mention this to her big brothers and sisters, as well as (Sensei), because she didn't want them to be scared of her.

Maybe later...I should go ask (Sensei) about this. He probably knows what this thing is; since (Sensei) is knowledgeable about everything! If it's him, I guess I won't mind sharing this secret ...

One day, (Sensei) suddenly gave Ubuki a necklace. It was a platinum-made necklace with a small golden ring attached at its tip.

"What's this?"

"This was given to me by my... previous precious person... I'm giving it to you right now."

"You sure?..."

"Yes, I hope that you can accept it.... No, I think you should have it."

"...Thank you."

Ubuki was sure...that was the first time she had fallen in love with someone.

She vowed in her chest that she would cherish the necklace forever.

"I hope that one day, you'll be able to use this for those that you hold dear. That way, this should be able to show you many beautiful dreams."

"No, never! I'm going to hold onto it forever!~"

The young man gazed straight at the blushing Ubuki with an eased expression. The usual stress that always enveloped him seemed to have lessened because of this.

And then, the incident happened the next day.

Ubuki could never forget the scene that happened at that time; not in her entire life.

--- The island that Ubuki grew up on was burning.

Without any warning, the incident just suddenly happened.

A raging fire enveloped the whole island.

As if they were alive, the roaring flames instantly engulfed the house where Ubuki and her siblings lived. Ubuki's big brothers and sisters all tried to save Ubuki, up until the very last moment before the flames engulfed them. Ubuki, who was pushed out of the house, could only sit there and gaze dumbfounded as the scene unfolded. It took her a while before she understood that, if she were to sit there and not

move, she too would be caught in the inferno. Ubuki then suddenly remembered (Sensei) and started to run decadently towards the clinic.

Running through the streets that felt as if one were running through hell, the clinic where she finally arrived at was also the same; the scorching temperature was so high that one couldn't even get close.

Ubuki tried to convince herself that (Sensei) was fine, and flew into the sky. This was not the time to worry about concealing her (Mushi). If she were to look from her favorite spot at the top of the hill, she may be able to find some survivors.

However, the scene that she finally saw on that hill only pushed her into a deeper despair.

Everything was burning.

Ubuki's school, the clinic, the ports...everything was engulfed by the flames.

Within her head, the image of (Sensei) being burned alive by the flames flashed through.

"Ahhh...Ahhhhhhhh....."

The island that she grew up on, and the happiness that she thought would continue on forever, were gradually being turned into ashes.

I wanted to say on this island forever ---

Ubuki's dream was also slowly fading away in front of her.

It was then that a woman appeared next to the crying Ubuki.

"I finally found you... My lovely child."

She was the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau's vice director --- Miguruma Yaeko.

The woman who could blind everything with her "Chain of Smile".

It was later that Ubuki would find out... that the tragedy that befell Aoharima Island was registered into the files as an outburst of the past head director. As to the reason why they burned down the entirety of the island, even Ubuki who was involved in the incident, was still unable to find out. But according to rumors, it seemed that one of "The Original Three" had been hiding on the island at the time. The fact that Ubuki became a Mushitsuki was the best evidence.

The one with the alias of (Sanbikime) seemed to be a prototype Mushi that was capable of giving birth to Fusion type Mushitsuki. Due to the fact that there were so few Fusion type Mushitsuki being born, and the fact that those who became Fusion types didn't even know who turned them into Mushitsuki in the first place... it was extremely difficult to lock down the identity of (Sanbikime).

"You will forgive me right? Since I love you this much..."

Yaeko hugged Ubuki as she said that.

Ubuki's body trembled as she felt terrified from her smile.

She could never forget what she vowed on that instant in her life.

I must take revenge...

Against the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau that deprived her of her older brothers and sisters.

And against... Miguruma Yaeko --- who deprived her of her precious person, (Sensei).

I'm going to make all of them taste the same pain that everyone had to go through. I'll laugh as I witness them!— witness their figures struggling in pain from the torment of hell.

--- Since the day she lost her dream, this wish had become the only thing that drove her to live on.

“I’m the only one around right now. But if you’re planning to run away, don’t blame me if I call others!”

(Kasuou) was sitting on the tip of a pile of wasted cars, grinning.

Black mist could be seen enveloping the blonde teenage girl. That fog of mist was her (Mushi)’s true form. It was capable of blocking external attacks, or turning into giant sharp claws to attack enemies; a weapon capable of both offense and defense. Even though (Kasuou) was thrown wholly into the ground by Ubuki earlier, she didn’t even have a scratch on her.

“So you wanted to see me that much huh?! I feel like I’ve fallen for you already, but setting that aside for now, how did you know I was going to come out from here?”

The raven dragonfly descended onto the injured Ubuki, and instantly turned into black tentacles in order to fuse together with her as one. However, due to the overwhelming fatigue, the movement of the pair of wings was slower than usual.

“Look at your leg!”

Ubuki heeded (Kasuou)’s words and looked at her right leg. Black mist could be seen wrapping around the wounds that were inflicted by (Kasuou) from earlier.

“That’s a part of my (Mushi). As long as I don’t dismiss it, I would be able to grasp your whereabouts no matter where you go.”

“Hmm... Is that so, really convenient huh.”

“Well, I guess I should at least ask before I kill you, do you have the CD?”

Facing (Kasuou)'s question, Ubuki felt stunned once again.

She had suspected this since long ago, if the mission was just recapturing a small fry like Ubuki, then the entire operation was too big to begin with. Everything was for the sake of reclaiming the CD that Yuu was holding after all.

However, Ubuki had never thought that she would be questioned about the whereabouts of the CD first.

"So to you guys...the CD was more important than the whereabouts of Shiika-tan...? (Kasuou)-tan...is that it?"

Ubuki asked in a hard-to-believe tone.

"Yuu-tan did say that she got it directly from (Centi), but I didn't believe in her at all. Because (Centi) had already become a Fallen hadn't he?... So there's no way— But...if that person was the real one then—"

"I haven't the slightest interest in that."

(Kasuou) replied emotionlessly and continued:

"The mission I received is --- to capture the guy named (Centi), and retrieve the CD. It doesn't matter if that guy is the real deal or not, to me at least."

An order that was issued to a high-ranked member like (Kasuou), and was even prioritized higher than the recapture of (Fuyuhotaru).

--- It seems like that CD is something much more dangerous than I've ever imagined...

Ubuki readjusted her knowledge upon hearing those words.

The CD that Yuu was holding seemed to have a value of the same level, or maybe even higher than (Fuyuhotaru).

"Hehe, I have the CD on me!"

Ubuki immediately tried to deceive (Kasuou), yet she remained unmoved.

"Whether the words you just said were true or not, I haven't the slightest intention of believing in them. After I've killed you, I'll do a body search anyway."

"Iya~, (Kasuou)-tan you ecchi~"

Right after saying that Ubuki couldn't help but feel embarrassed, thinking that the words that she just said were pretty idiotic. (Kasuou) seemed to have entered her serious fighting mode, and ignored Ubuki's perverted jokes.

Upon (Kasuou)'s face, who was overlooking Ubuki, a smile emerged. A twisted smile from the happiness and joy that came from the bottom of her heart, which made it seem as if she had gone insane.

"To be honest, I was really looking forward to it... Even though I didn't get to join the battle of Hashiba City two months ago, this should make up for it... A mission of a higher priority than the recapture of (Fuyuhotaru)... Do you even understand what it means?... It means that another war, even greater than any of the ones that have ever happened before, is going to erupt!"

Ubuki displayed a wry smile:

"(Kasuou)-tan you really like to fight huh?"

"Yea, I fucking love it! The reason why I came to the Central Headquarters was because there are more opportunities to fight here than anywhere else."

"I hate fighting the most... I would be very happy so long as I could fly over the sky on that island..."

Ubuki suddenly recalled the pristine blue sky of Aoharima Island. During fair weather, the sea would flash brightly like a sapphire. Being able to fly in between the sun and the sea was the greatest, most irreplaceable joy Ubuki could ever have.

"It's because you keep saying these kinds of naïve words that you lost your hometown!"

(Kasuou) leapt straight down from the mountain of trashed cars at once.

"Weaklings...shouldn't complain a bit when their stuff is taken away from them, even if that means their own lives!"

"Ahaha, (Kasuou)-tan, you mean you're going to take away my life as well now?"

Ubuki raised her brows.

"Don't you think...what you guys have taken away from me is enough?! (Kasuou)!!!"

(Kasuou)'s countless claws swung straight down from above Ubuki.

Ubuki instantly fled to her side and dodged the attack. When (Kasuou) landed onto the ground, she immediately released more claws to chase after her. Ubuki hurriedly soared towards the sky, trying to get away from her reach.

"I'm tired of seeing your back already!"

The sharp claws, one by one, pierced the surrounding wasted cars before lifting them up.

"...!"

In front of Ubuki who turned to look at the ground, numerous cars had already appeared.

"Ugh...!"

Ubuki was unable to completely dodge them all; her shoulder was hit by a small passenger car. She lost her balance in the air, and began to fall towards the ground.

(Kasuou) seemed to have thrown the cars, which her claws had pierced, at her. Although Ubuki was aware of her strength, she had never thought that she was this strong.

The instant before Ubuki was about to crash into the ground, she managed to recover her balance.

However, (Kasuou)'s claws immediately followed.

Although Ubuki narrowly dodged the incoming attacks, she was gradually being surrounded by the claws. She had already entered (Kasuou)'s attack range, if she were to turn her back on (Kasuou) or make even one careless mistake; she would instantly be pierced by the claws.

Ubuki took a chance and extended the tentacles behind her back, using them to grab onto a car door that had fallen nearby, and threw it at (Kasuou). However, the fog of mist surrounding (Kasuou) effortlessly reflected the door away. Even the attacker Ubuki herself found it too amusing to even call it an "attack".

The Kashu level three ranked (Kasuou), against the no-rank Ubuki; the difference in strength between the two was so obvious that one could tell at a glance.

"If you listen to me and stay still, I will not torture you. I'll make sure to finish you off with one hit!"

Ubuki clearly understood that because of her overwhelmed fatigue and injuries, her movement had become much slower.

--- (Sensei), I'm not going to die like this!

Ubuki forcibly bit her lips to a point where blood could be seen oozing out.

Why am I...so weak?

Through the past 3 years...the ever increasing hatred and anger that were stored within her, and the resentment of not being able to get revenge for her hometown; she had to endure all those simply because she was too weak.

--- (Sensei), I want strength... I really want to be become stronger!

Sent flying by (Kasuou)'s claw, Ubuki fell into a roll on the ground. Her body crashed into a hill made of trashed cars, causing her to momentarily having difficulty breathing.

"Hu...Uu..."

"Haa...Haa... Despite you being unranked garbage, you actually gave me tons of fun!"

(Kasuou) walked closer to the fallen Ubuki.

In her view, that was becoming blurred due to the fatigue and pain, she caught a glimpse of (Kasuou)'s smile. Behind Ubuki, a giant hoist crane could be seen.

"(Kasuou)-tan..."

"Hmm?"

(Kasuou) stopped the action of lifting up her claws.

"Now that I think about it, we've known each other for quite a long time already... As friends, could you help me fulfill my last wish?"

The blonde teenage girl became silent as if she was pondering about Ubuki's sudden words.

"I don't recall when I became friends with you. But... if you have any last words, I guess I will listen to them."

"My hometown...the one who burned the Aoharima Island...who is it? I only knew it was that woman that gave the order... Weren't you, (Kasuou)-tan, also on the island when it happened...?"

"...I don't know. I was still a member of the East Central Division at that time. I only went to that island as support because they told me I could fight all I want..."

"Is that so..."

"I also have one last question to ask you."

The smile disappeared from the blonde teenage girl's expression.

"Assisting (Fuyuhotaru) to escape, and helping that brat with the CD... What exactly are you planning to do? Where are you planning to go?"

".....You still don't understand?"

"For revenge?"

(Kasuou)'s expression darkened. She bit her lips, as if she was pondering about something.

"...It's still not too late. Tell me the whereabouts of (Fuyuhotaru) and the CD, and then flee to Ouka City! Vice director wouldn't chase after a no-rank like you. Once you arrive at the East Central Division, they would most likely be willing to hide you, I can also ask (Kakkou) to ---"

"(Kasuou)-tan you're pretty kind eh... but you're the only one that's naïve....."

Under the goggles, Ubuki distorted her expression as she squeezed all her strength into her clenching fists.

“That woman probably didn’t even give a fuck about me at all... That’s the point that pisses me off the most!”

Above them came the sound of metal scrubbing against each other.

“...!”

(Kasuou) immediately raised her head to look above.

At the tip of the wasted cars’ mountain, the car that was hooked by the hoister crane was swaying towards the edge.

Taking the advantage of the instant the blonde teenage girl was distracted, Ubuki flew to the side with full speed.

--- The tentacle that extended from Ubuki’s back, stretched along the ground towards the hoister crane.

During the time of their conversation, Ubuki extended and stretched her tentacle bit by bit along the ground so that (Kasuou) wouldn’t notice. The tentacle that was stretched to its limit was climbing the wire, reaching all the way to the tip of the hook.

Ubuki’s tentacle used the hook and the wire of the hoister crane, in order to move the trashed car that was at the top of the mountain.

“Woohhhh!”

The trashed car crashed into the ground; the figure of the blonde teenage girl was covered completely by the rusty car body.

The sudden quake caused the mountain of wasted cars nearby to lose balance, which resulted in a big landslide; great amounts of cars flooded the location the blonde teenage girl stood on within seconds.

“Haa...Haa...!”

Ubuki stood on the ground, panting heavily as her tentacle returned to its original length.

After the dust had settled down, the abandoned car factory returned to its quiet atmosphere once again.

“Ahaha.....”

Showing a smile, Ubuki stayed rooted to the ground, dumbfounded.

“If even this doesn’t work... What else can I do...?”

The mist that wrapped around the wound on Ubuki’s right leg did not disappear.

“You know that very well, don’t you (Karasu)?”

A claw that emerged from the pile sent all of the surrounding wasted cars flying.

--- And then, the figure of the unscathed (Kasuou) appeared.

"Before I even knew it, you've already become worthy of being called a fighter... I won't go easy or be careless with you anymore, I'll defeat you with my full strength."

Ubuki squeezed out the rest of her strength and flew to the sky, before charging straight at (Kasuou) at full speed.

"Hoah!"

Claws stormed at her like rain drops.

Ubuki spun her body to perform an emergency rotation, narrowly dodging the incoming claws one by one. When she flew past (Kasuou), she used her tentacles to grab onto the blonde teenage girl along with the cloud of mist surrounding her.

Taking (Kasuou) along with her, Ubuki soared faster and higher into the sky.

"It's no use! No matter how high you drop me, I'll be fine!"

Ubuki ignored the teenage girl's warning, and soared higher towards the clouds.

(Kasuou) created numerous sharp claws with her mist in the air to aim at Ubuki.

"Ugh...!"

However, Ubuki continued to dodge the claws with wide-angle turns. The claws that were swaying left and right could not lock on properly to their target, causing (Kasuou) to suck her teeth angrily.

Ubuki continued to accelerate higher into the sky.

Faster.

And faster.

"Ugh...?"

By the time (Kasuou) changed her expression, they already reached the altitude where they could touch the clouds merely by reaching their hands outward.

"...You...bastard! Don't tell...me you're trying...to...!"

After realizing Ubuki's purpose, (Kasuou) desperately swung her black sharp claws. The tip of the claw grazed Ubuki's leg, causing a sharp pain to ache against Ubuki. However, Ubuki didn't stop.

She continued to soar higher into the sky.

Faster, and faster.

--- “You... flew so fast... and stopped all of sudden... my breathing... ahh... my head also feels rushed ...!”

Those were the words that Yuu had said. After hearing that, Ubuki muttered and pondered about it before she fell asleep that day.

“You gotta...be kidding me! I won’t...lose...to anyone...!”

(Kasuou)’s shouting was gradually becoming weaker and weaker.

After breaking through the clouds, Ubuki’s vision turned completely white.

At the same time her consciousness was also becoming more and more blurred.

Her body was feeling weaker and weaker, as the whiteness in front of her slowly eroded by darkness.

And then, what Ubuki saw --- was the same illusion as always.

In the pitch-black darkness, she herself that was reaching her hands forward. Trying desperately to hold onto something in the middle of this darkness, yet her hands could never grasp anything.

--- I can no longer obtain anything...can no longer take back anything...

After the illusion flashed through, Ubuki’s speed began to slow down.

Under the strong glare of sunlight, transparent tears began to ooze through the gaps of the shining goggles.

--- I already knew such things... But I’m not smart... I just couldn’t think of any other better ways... (Sensei) ...

“...”

After a few minutes, Ubuki descended onto the ground.

She released the unconscious (Kasuou), who had become motionless, from the grip of her tentacles.

Due to the side-effect of constant acceleration, the rate of blood flowing toward one’s brain would become much slower, which in the end would result in a symptom known as “Blackout”. This symptom was known to often occur among jet pilots.

Ubuki gazed down at the unconscious (Kasuou). The mist that wrapped around her leg before had disappeared the instant the blonde teenage girl lost her consciousness.

(Kasuou) was one of the people that happened to be on Aoharima Island 3 years ago, doing this to her might have fulfilled a part of her revenge.

Yet Ubuki couldn’t feel anything; not only did she not feel a sense of fulfillment from achieving her revenge, she couldn’t even feel the slightest bit of joy from defeating a high-ranked member.

She didn't utter a word, and merely held onto the pendant hanging in front of her chest.

Looking at (Kasuou), she couldn't help but suddenly feel very sorrowful.

Ubuki then turned around, and left the blonde teenage girl. The raven dragonfly de-fused from her body.

"Hehe, I beat (Kasuou)-tan, (Sensei)..."

Trudging her body covered with wounds, Ubuki left the abandoned car factory.

"I'm amazing right?... Even I couldn't believe it myself..."

Amidst the hoarse murmurs, a faint sobbing could be heard mixed along. Her following words were covered by the sound of a train passing by her.

"...(Sensei), come praise me.....(Sensei)..."

During these past 3 years, Ubuki thought she had already gotten used to loneliness.

She thought that the pain of losing those precious to her, had finally alleviated.

And instead, the desire for vengeance had grown stronger day by day.

--- Those were what she thought was happening to her, but she was wrong.

"I want to...go back...go back to the island... I don't want to fight anymore... want to go back to the island where Onii and Onee, and (Sensei) are at..."

Through the past 3 years, Ubuki had not changed the slightest.

The never-ending homesickness and loneliness had pushed her into an infinite solitude. This sadness was so painful that it was unbearable; she even began to have thoughts that revenge didn't matter anymore.

Her legs naturally moved towards a certain place.

She herself clearly understood that there won't be anyone there; she already knew...that there wouldn't be anyone waiting for her anymore.

But even so, she had no other choice. Because there were no other places she could go anymore, there were no other places she could go back to anymore.

By the time she reached the bridge that connected to Higano City, the sun had already been dyed red.

Gazing at the ships floating above the water, Ubuki walked down the stairways beneath the bridge. There weren't any signs of people on the riverbank.

Ubuki's body was gradually losing strength as her consciousness began to become blurred again... Was it because of the fact that her (Mushi) had devoured too much of her dream?

“Ahaha..... Is this where I’m going to end...?”

She already knew that there wasn't anyone waiting for her.

And just when Ubuki was about to give in and collapse ---

“I-Is she going to come, Shiika-san?... She might have already gotten finished off by (Kasuou), or ...”

“Don’t worry, Ubuki will definitely come.”

“You have been repeating that same line over and over... P-Perhaps, Ubuki-san has already abandoned us...”

“.....”

“W-Why did you stop talking?! You have to deny what I just said, Shiika-san!”

Ubuki widened her eyes, these voice were definitely not her delusions.

Focusing her gaze at the shade beneath the bridge, on the other side of a wall made out of cardboard boxes, two heads could be seen moving.

Strength began to return to Ubuki’s body as the fragments of her dream began to restore within her.

--- (*Sensei*)...

Ubuki lowered her head, before forming a smile on her face.

--- *It looks like it’s still too early for me to die.....*

Ubuki then suddenly raised her head.

“Woooahh~!”

Ubuki roared out loud, causing the two heads over at the cardboard boxes to flinch.

“(Kasuou)-sama is here~! I’m going to eat you all!~”

Shiika and Yuu poked their heads out. Upon seeing Ubuki, they showed smiles filled with relief, but Yuu immediately turned around with a slightly angry expression.

“Ubuki! You were okay...!”

“I-I had originally wanted to go ahead! But Shiika-san said...that we made a promise to go to Ouka City together, and wouldn’t listen... to me...”

“Ubuki, are you hurt?!”

“It’s nothing to worry about, It will heal by itself really soon! Putting that aside, I’m hungry!~ Yuu-tan buy something for me to eat!”

“...”

“What’s wrong, Yuu-tan?”

“U-Uhm...I-I will try my best to not to be a burden to you guys! So please ---”

Ubuki showed a smile. If it weren’t for Yuu’s words, she could have never won against (Kasuou) right?

“Yuu-tan you’re not a burden!”

“So please don’t --- Ehhh?”

“Putting that aside, I want to eat steak or BBQ! Yuu-tan go buy meat, I want meat!”

“W-We don’t have any extra money for meat!”

“Meat...”

“Shiika-san! Stop making that kind of looking-forward-to-it expression!”

Underneath the bridge that was colored by the rays of sunset, the riot between the three teenage girls continued for a while.

2.04

Shiika Part 3

The three of them that had finally escaped Akamaki City, were now peeping at a building on the border of Higano City.

“So what if there’s people there? SEPB won’t check places like these!”

“T-That’s not the only problem! Just thinking that people might see us is already... It’s definitely a better idea to look for an empty house to stay overnight at than this, definitely!”

“Eh---I don’t want that! Shiika-tan you also don’t want to stay in such a cold place right?”

“M-Mmm...Yea...But, uhm...”

“Stop wasting our time, let’s go ---!”

Being pushed by Ubuki, Shiika and Yuu stepped into the building.

“W-What are you doing, Ubuki-san!”

“Welcome!”

“Stop greeting us like you’re the staff here!”

“Ah look, the sign says the counter is right over there!~”

“T-There shouldn’t be anyone here right? We’ve been trying to look for places where there’s no one around, so obviously there wouldn’t be anyone here but still... E-Eh, how does this works?”

“Ah, this room looks so big! Awesome, there’s even underwear vending machine in here. Here I go! Press~!”

“Ahh! That room is expensive! I’ve told you many times that we needa pick a cheaper ---“

“Uhm...guys...someone is coming...”

“Kyaa---! We have to go! Hurry!”

The three of them ran for the elevators, and headed toward the room written on the key that they received.

When they saw a couple in the hallway, Shiika and Yuu pressed against the wall and moved out of the way.

“Hey, are you guys in love?”

“S-Stop messing around, Ubuki-san!”

The three of them entered the target room, however, despite entering the room, the noisiness still continued.

“Okay, listen up! Because of this room, our funding has shrunk dramatically. Hence, we’re only taking a short break here! We don’t have much time left, and not to mention we can’t afford to pay extra for staying any longer---“

“Shiika-tan, you want a drink?”

“U-Ubuki-san! Don’t open the fridge without asking! I told you we don’t have that much ---“

“Ahh...”

“Kya!!! Shiika-san, y-you can’t! TV, t-turn it off! You can’t watch that kind of stuff!”

“Ohh, this tastes good, one more bottle~”

“I told you already you can’t open the fridge!!”

By the time they arrived at Higano City from flying under the bridge, it was already evening.

In the end, they listened to Ubuki’s suggestion and concluded that --- it was too dangerous to move at night, so they should move tomorrow morning. Not to mention, the three of them were very tired already, hence they were planning on using their remaining bit of money to spend a night at a hotel. However, it was not like they could just find a random hotel.

They were looking for a hotel that fit their special criteria. And since this hotel was self-service, even if there were just three teenage girls like them, they wouldn’t be suspected by anyone.

Although the appearance of the hotel was rather old on the surface, its interior was decorated very aesthetically. Within the room, there was a king-sized bed, a TV and a refrigerator.

“I’m going to use the shower first! Here Shiika-tan, help me hold onto this.”

Ubuki handed her necklace to the blushing Shiika who had just turned off the TV.

“This is something very important to me, don’t lose it! Oh, perhaps you guys wanna come with me? I’ll take good care of you~~”

“O-Of course not! And what do you mean by “taking good care of us”?!”

The one who replied first was Yuu.

“Something very important...”

Shiika gazed at the necklace she was holding in her hands. The ring that was hanging at the tip of the silver necklace was shining brightly from the reflection of the light.

"Is it some kind of gift from your boyfriend?"

Yuu asked in a mischievous tone, which Ubuki nodded in response:

"Kya--- don't say that, I'll be embarrassed!"

"Eh?! Really?!"

"Ubuki you actually have a lover...?"

"One that got killed by SEPB that is."

The Ubuki who took off her sweater blurted that line out bluntly.

Both Shiika and Yuu were stunned by this, and turned to look at Ubuki at once.

"Eh.....?"

"Just kidding! This necklace... how should I put it... Well, it's something like a remnant of my hometown! After all, everything else was burned up."

Ubuki spoke in a casual tone as she removed her clothes one after another. After taking off her headscarf, burn marks could be seen on her exposed forehead.

"W-Why are you taking your clothes off here?! Please go to the bathroom and undress there!"

"Comon, what's the big deal~? A wordy kid like you should be taken away with force! Come, let's gooo~"

"W-What! Wait, stop! I told you I'm not going to shower with you already didn't ---"

Just like that, Yuu was taken away by the naked Ubuki without even getting a chance to fight back. Shortly after, the sound of them shouting at each other could be heard coming from the bathroom.

The Shiika who was left behind gazed at the necklace in her hands.

--- "If I were to obtain that freedom, then there would really be nothing left of me!"

Shiika suddenly recalled the words Ubuki had said.

"....."

She silently held the necklace against her chest.

After taking their showers, the three of them immediately plunged into the quilt. Because of the fact that there was only one bed, they had to sleep side by side, with Yuu stuck in the middle.

Perhaps they were too tired; the three of them didn't talk anymore and immediately fell asleep.

Giving in to the drowsiness willingly, Shiika quietly fell asleep.

And after who-knows-how-long had passed, a weak sound caused her to open her heavy eyelids slightly.

There was a figure moving in her vision.

It was Ubuki.

The slender teenage girl, who'd been in her underwear when she'd crawled into bed, had already dressed up. Ubuki walked closer toward the hanger, furtively doing something that Shiika couldn't see.

".....!"

From the pocket of Yuu's clothes, Ubuki quietly took out a CD with both hands. She then turned around to look in the direction of the bed.

Shiika hurriedly closed her eyes; she could feel Ubuki gazing at the sleeping Yuu and her.

By the time Shiika reopened her eyes, she only caught a glimpse of Ubuki walking out of the room. Ubuki was holding her long coat and goggles in her arms.

--- *Ubuki...*?

"....."

Shiika quietly got off the bed and dressed up, trying to follow Ubuki, who had left the room.

But by the time she walked out into the hallway, Ubuki had already disappeared.

She looked around anxiously, only to find out that the door leading to the emergency exit stairway at the end of the hallway up ahead was slightly opened; Shiika then jogged towards the direction of the door.

It seemed like it was closed to sunrise outside; the ray of dawn shined brightly against Shiika when she opened the door.

Upon seeing Ubuki sitting on the emergency exit's stairway with her back facing her, Shiika instinctually hid behind the door.

In front of Shiika, Ubuki put on her goggles. Accompanied by the sound of air being released on the side of the goggles, which was the spot above her ear, an elongated slot appeared. Ubuki inserted the CD into the slot.

"....."

For a period of time, Ubuki stayed where she was, not moving in the slightest.

After several dozens of minutes had passed, the CD was ejected from the goggles, yet Ubuki still didn't move at all. Even though Shiika knew something was wrong, upon seeing Ubuki's trembling shoulders, she could only hold her breath and watch.

"--- I will definitely kill you..."

Ubuki's sudden words, spoken in a suppressed, low voice, caused Shiika's heart to skip a beat.

"That woman...I will definitely use my own hands to make her suffer the pain of living hell! Why is she doing these kinds of things?! I-I can't believe that (Centi) was the real one... But if so, doesn't that make Shiika-tan... Just how long do you want Mushitsuki to sacrifice their lives for you until you're satisfied?!--
_"

Ubuki muttered angrily, which caused the scared Shiika to take a few steps back. And it was then that Shiika's feet touched the door, making a slight noise.

"Ah..."

Ubuki immediately turned around stunned as she held onto the CD and took off her goggles.

"Did you think I was going to run away like this, Shiika-tan?"

The Ubuki who turned her head around, showed a threatening smile.

"Don't worry! I still have a lot of things waiting for Shiika-tan you to help me finish! I won't run away, and I won't let you go either!"

Being pressured by Ubuki's strange manner, Shiika curled up her body.

"Ubuki....."

"What is it?"

"What exactly are you...trying to do? What is it that you want me to help you do?"

"About that, I can't tell you right now... But..."

Ubuki grabbed Shiika's wrist. Her tight grip caused Shiika to lock her brows.

"Don't forget, the one that saved Shiika-tan was me! After you obtain the thing you requested, you have to follow what I said according to our promise!"

"..."

"Where's your answer? It should be "Yes, I understand", right?"

"If I listen to you, would that make you feel better?"

Facing Shiika's question, Ubuki instantly became stunned.

“The thing you said about the necklace was true, right? The things you’re trying to do, if they are revenge or retaliation, I...”

Before Shiika could finish, Ubuki brutally pushed Shiika against the wall.

“What are you trying to say?!”

Ubuki suddenly changed into a raging expression, and glared at Shiika.

“You’re telling me that you’re not gonna listen to me? If so, then this little game of escape is over! I’ll disclose our whereabouts to SEPB, and drag you along with me!”

“But, things like revenge ---”

“What do you even know?! Have you seen the scene of your family being burned in front of you, the scene when the person you loved the most was being burned alive, and the scene when everything you held dear was being turned into ashes?! Tell me, have you seen anything like that?! Shiika-tan you’re different from me; it’s because you’re strong that you’re saying these kind of nice things with such ease! Someone that’s as dumb and weak as me, what do you want me to ---!”

“There was once a person that thinks just like you...only wants to use evil against evil!”

Shiika could not endure it and raised her voice. This caused Ubuki to stop immediately; it was the first time Ubuki had seen Shiika shouting after all.

“But, that person... she died...!”

Recalling her memories, Shiika shed tears one after another. The teenage girl, who had also said similar words to Ubuki’s, had disappeared in front of Shiika in a blink of an eye.

“Rina she...s-she died...!”

Ubuki showed a startled look, but immediately locked her brows.

“Even if I were to die, it has nothing to do with Shiika-tan! A Hishu level one ranked like you would never understand.”

“I don’t want to see those that had forgotten their dreams and are suffering painfully for the sake of revenge anymore..... There actually isn’t any Mushitsuki that’s strong...”

Shiika raised her head to gaze at Ubuki.

Just at that instant, Shiika noticed the eyes of the slender teenage girl suddenly lost their luster and became void. However, Ubuki immediately shook her head left and right as if she had come back to her senses right after.

“.....!”

Shiika knew exactly what this symptom was.

It can't be wrong... It's the symptom when one's dream is about to be devoured completely by their (Mushi)!

"Ubuki---"

Ubuki slapped away the hand of Shiika who was trying to support her.

"It's already too late! These past three years, I've been dying to take revenge against that woman every single day! My hands...can no longer hold onto anything else! I can no longer take back anything with these hands anymore! That's why, I'm going to strangle that woman with these hands! These hands only exist to take the life of that woman!"

Ubuki, who was filled with rage, brutally grabbed Shiika, yet Shiika gently placed her hands on top of Ubuki's hands.

"I'm not strong at all... Compared to you, I'm probably a lot weaker..."

"That's not true! If I were to be as strong as you...!"

"That's why...When I do this, I'll be able to feel at ease... When I touch someone's hand, I would be slightly relieved...because I've always been alone... Just by touching your hands right now, would make me feel at ease!"

Ubuki's eyes were starting to waver from being shaken.

"Your hands, should only exist to do this..."

".....!"

The headscarf teenage girl felt her vision began to distort slightly. In Shiika's eyes, she probably had an expression close to tears.

"Don't---"

Ubuki lowered her head and shouted:

"Don't touch my hands!"

She forcefully pushed Shiika away, and turned away. As if she was protecting the hands that were just touched by Shiika, she squeezed her hands tightly against her chest.

"Shiika-tan, you also wanted to take it away from me...? If I were to lose this feeling... if I were to lose this hatred then... Don't take it away! Stop depriving things from me anymore!"

"Ubuki....."

The Ubuki that was holding her hands, curling up her back trembling, seemed just like a terrified kid.

Coming from behind Ubuki, Shiika hugged her arms around her. Upon being embraced by Shiika, Ubuki's body flinched.

"...Why did you guys have to be there under that bridge...?"

Ubuki asked with a whisper:

"Why did you guys wait for me... Even without me, Shiika-tan you should be able..."

"I'm not telling you!"

Shiika imitated Ubuki's manner of speaking and replied.

Even though she was surprised, Ubuki immediately pouted her lips:

"Stop copying me!"

"It was probably because... I felt I need to see you again."

Ubuki widened her eyes.

"Because you saved me, that's why I wanted to go to Ouka City with you. If it were only Yuu and I... we would get caught immediately."

Ubuki spaced out for a while. But shortly after, she showed a weak smile.

"Let me remind you of this first! Shiika-tan you're still my slave! Don't forget that!"

"Ah...Mmm..."

"Of course Yuu-tan too! But for Shiika-tan... I guess I'll treat you as a slave that's a little bit higher in status than Yuu-tan."

"Should I say...thanks...?"

Just when Shiika was tilting her head to the side, a shout suddenly came from the other side of the emergency exit.

"Shiika-san! Ubuki-san! Where are you?!"

It was Yuu's voice.

Shiika and Ubuki poked their head out from behind the door, and saw Yuu circling around anxiously, looking around.

"Where did you guys go?! The CD is gone... Don't tell me you guys are gonna leave me like this...!"

Yuu immediately slumped onto the ground.

“Why did you guys go without saying anything?! Didn’t I say I would try to not become a burden to you guys... Didn’t Shiika-san say we’re gonna go to Ouka City together...?! W-Why...Why did you guys left me behind...! Uuwaaa!”

Yuu began to cry out loud, causing the surrounding tenants to come out of their rooms to see what was going on.

“You idiots! Idiot, idiot, idiot, idiot, idiot! I hate Shiika-san and Ubuki-san the most! You jerks!”

“...This looks fun, why don’t we watch this for a while?”

Shiika ignored Ubuki’s suggestion. She just wanted to return to Yuu’s side immediately and make her feel at ease ---

“Ubuki-san you idiot! Shiika-san you ecchi!”

The Shiika, who was about to stand up, stopped moving upon hearing this.

“She should be referring to the incident when Shiika-tan you turned on the AV Video right?... Can’t believe someone like you would actually do something like that, I guess it’s true when it comes to the saying that one can’t judge a book by its cover... Aha... Just kidding... don’t show that kind of scary face....”

“...”

“Uuuuwaaahhhh...!”

Just like that, Yuu’s crying voice continued all the way until the sun rose.

3.00

Yuu Part 4

Ever since the encounter at Akamaki City, this was their second time welcoming the morning together.

In the hotel room where they had just spent a night sleeping over, the three of them were facing each other, discussing.

“Okay, our goal today is to arrive at Ouka City before the night falls! Shiika-san, and Ubuki-san, please take note to not do anything that makes you stand out, got that?!”

“Aye Aye, captain!”

“Who are you calling captain?!...Well...I did actually take the role of class president back in my school, but that’s not the point there!”

“Reporting to captain, Shiika-tan seems to have something to say.”

“Eh? Me?”

“.....What’s it?”

“Shiika-tan said that she doesn’t want to get ordered around by someone who only knows how to cry out loud like a kid.”

“T-That was...!”

Yuu instantly became flushed.

Yesterday night... or rather today’s early morning, right after Yuu woke up, she found out she was left alone by herself on the bed with both Shiika and Ubuki nowhere in sight.

The CD in Yuu’s pocket was gone as well. Because of this, Yuu thought that the two of them had abandoned her, and broke into tears.

“It’s because you guys disappeared without saying anything...and the CD was gone as well...!”

“We only went out together to take a look at the situation outside! And besides, wasn’t the CD safe and sound in your clothes’ pocket after all?”

What Ubuki said was right; they came back very soon after that. When Yuu told them the CD was gone, Ubuki replied “Really?” while searching Yuu’s clothing. And then immediately, Ubuki’s hand went in the other side’s pocket and fished out the CD she was looking for. It seemed like Yuu had remembered incorrectly which pocket she used to put the CD in.

“L-Let’s just forget about her and go, Shiika-tan.”

“Ah, mm...”

Just when Yuu and Shiika were about to walk out of the room, the phone in their room suddenly rang.

Yuu immediately rushed to the phone, and picked up the call.

“I’m sorry, we will immediately leave right now ---“

“No, please don’t leave the hotel.”

A calm, young girl’s voice came from the other end of the phone.

“E-Erii!”

Shiika and Ubuki turned around to look at Yuu.

“(Fuyuhotaru) is there right? Please switch her to the phone.”

“She says that she wants to talk to you Shiika-san...”

Facing Yuu, Shiika showed a perplexed expression. Meanwhile, Ubuki snatched away the phone on the side.

“Are you the one who helped them yesterday? Who are you? How did you know our whereabouts?”

Ubuki questioned in a low suppressed voice, while Yuu and Shiika moved closer to the phone with their ears.

“(Karasu), I have nothing to say to you, switch (Fuyuhotaru) to the phone.”

“Why should I obey the order from a brat whom I have never seen before? Stop surreptitiously following us from behind, and show us who you are!”

“I do have that intention; now give the phone to (Fuyuhotaru).”

The three of them exchanged glances with each other, before Shiika took the phone from Ubuki.

“H-Hello... thanks for saving us yesterday...”

“Don’t mention it. More importantly, please do not act rashly and leave your current location. The Central Headquarters’ combatants are currently surrounding the Higano City.”

The three of them became speechless.

H-How...? How did they know we were at Higano City?

Before Yuu could open her mouth and ask that question, Erii continued talking:

“Not only that, the Central Headquarters had also mobilized forces to Ouka City. And in addition, perhaps because they were aware of what the Central Headquarters is doing, the East Central Division had also begun to act. Two forces have never been so close together before. If the Headquarters were to clash head on with the East Central Division --- the situation will become even worse. That’s why, any suspicious movements you make from now on might result in you being attacked right away.”

“...”

“Even risking the chance of clashing with the East Central Division, the Headquarters still want to take it back... (Fuyuhotaru) you, and the CD... If that CD were to fall into the hands of the East Central Division, then a war might really break out within the SEPB.”

--- A w-war...?! Because of this CD?!

Shifting her gaze away from the trembling Yuu, Shiika held onto the phone with both hands.

“What exactly is in the CD that Yuu-chan is holding? And what does it have to do with me ---“

“Wait, Shiika-tan. Before asking about the CD, we need to first ask this girl one question.”

Ubuki stared straight at the phone with a stern expression.

“Why did the Central Headquarters gather in Higano City? The fact that we arrived at Higano City from Akamaki City, how did the Central Headquarters find out? Even our plan of going to Ouka City, they seemed to have known them all. Why is that?”

“I don’t know the details of it.”

“Erii-tan, was it not leaked out by you?”

Ubuki questioned in a sharp voice.

“...”

Yuu then suddenly realized.

That’s right; Yuu had once accidentally told Erii their destination. Hence, Erii was the only one else that knew where they were going.

But, that would also lead to a contradiction in a way.

“B-But...Erii saved us yesterday.....”

Just as Shiika said, if she were to have that intention, she could’ve done so back at Akamaki City.

“Exactly, (Karasu)...You have secretly contacted the others, haven’t you?”

“...Eh?”

Yuu turned to gaze at Ubuki.

“You’re putting the blame on me now?!”

Ubuki raised her eyebrows.

“Who are you?! Show yourself!”

“U-Ubuki...!”

“That’s exactly what I’m planning to do; I’ve just arrived at Higano City. There’s a shopping center at the end of the street you’re on, let’s meet up there... Do you have anything that you can write with near you? I’ll tell you the approximate location of the combatants situated in Higano city. You guys can just follow ---”

“Answer my question! Who are you?! How did you know these things?!”

“I’ll tell you everything when we meet.”

From start to end, Erii kept a consistently calm attitude.

On the memo pad next to the phone, Shiika drew out the approximate layout of the pursuers situated in Higano City according to the content of Erii’s explanation.

“.....”

The amount of pursuers, that Erii listed one after another, immediately caused the three of them to become speechless.

--- How the hell can...we get away...from this...?

Yuu shouted within her.

The whole Higano City was almost completely filled with pursuers.

“You want us to believe in the words you said?”

Ubuki finally spoke. Her voice had a slight provoking tone in it, and her expression was serious.

“Do you think the three of you can break through Higano City with this many pursuers in it? The miracle of defeating (Kasuou) would not happen for the second time. (Karasu), just you alone, would not be able to protect (Fuyuhotaru).”

Yuu heard the sound of Ubuki grinding her teeth.

“B-But...”

Yuu suddenly spoke.

“The location of the building that we’re supposed to meet up is in the opposite direction of Ouka City... Going somewhere that far, it’d be evening by the time we arrive... Right now, we definitely have to arrive at Ouka before tomorrow...!”

“That’s no problem, please trust me, (Fuyuhotaru).”

Yuu and Ubuki turned to look at Shiika with perplexed expressions.

Shiika closed her lips, as if she was pondering about something.

And very soon, she made the decision.

“Let’s go, to the shopping center.”

The sky above Higano City was clear as blue today, with white clouds floating slowly high above.

After leaving the hotel, Yuu and the others moved eastwards.

Let’s meet up at the shopping center ---

After saying that, Erii hanged up on the call. As for the time when Ubuki requested, “You have to come alone!” the girl replied straight away with “Of course.”

Higano City was a city known for being a suburb with a lot of old buildings; sandwiched in between Akamaki City and Ouka City, two large-scaled cities. And between Higano City and Ouka City, there was a highway running across.

Yuu and others followed an arc-like route within Higano City, and advanced slowly forward.

On the way, the three of them were fully cautious; hence the pursuers haven’t found them yet. At the places where Erii mentioned, the presences of white-attired figure had been seen numerous times already; it was clearly terrifying to them. It was always Yuu that took the lead and observed their surroundings first, before they move on.

When it was almost noon, the incident of Ubuki making a fuss shouting, “I want meat! Steak! Or Barbecue!!!” happened. Yuu took great efforts using the meat buns that were sold at nearby food stands to make her shut up; and this had also become the trio’s lunch.

“Looks like we can successfully arrive at the shopping center!”

Underneath the highway, while walking on the road that didn’t have any cement paved on it, Yuu whispered lightly.

“But we’re also getting further and further away from Ouka City...”

Even though Yuu had said to believe in Erii, her uneasiness only intensified more and more. She felt like she was slowly giving in to the anxiousness within her, having the impulse of wanting to change direction and go straight for Ouka city.

“Well... That girl named Erii, who exactly is she?,,,”

Facing Shiika’s question, Ubuki put up a dirty look and said disdainfully:

“Those who say please trust me are the ones that shouldn’t be trusted at all!”

Ubuki seemed to still not trust Erii for some reason.

Well, it was normal to not trust a stranger that came out of nowhere; even Yuu was still dubious right now.

But it was a fact that Erii had saved both Yuu and Shiika back at Akamaki City, and even now it was also because of Erii’s Intel that they were advancing without meeting any enemies.

There are full of enemies ---

Yuu began to ponder, and recalled the dangerous situation from yesterday.

“U-Ubuki-san, (Kasuou) is really not hunting after us anymore right?...”

Ubuki nodded her head and replied as she placed her finger-crossed hands behind her head:

“Should be! Headquarters is very strict with those who failed their mission. Beaten by a low-ranked me, not only should she get a downgrade in her ranking, she should also receive a penalty along with it.”

“So awesome; Ubuki actually could beat someone like that!”

“Hehe, praise me at least another 235 more times!”

“So awesome, so awesome, so awesome, so awesome---“

“Don’t get too serious with her, Shiika-san...”

“Ohh, (Yotsume)-tan and (Ashitaka)-tan were also defeated by me!”

“Yea yea, you defeated him by luring him to attack the cables right? I’ve heard of it many times already... But speaking of them isn’t (Kasuou) and those people the strongest members in the Central Headquarters? Giving them penalty at times like this...”

“That woman is like that. Because the head director doesn’t stay in the central headquarters that often, she usually uses this kind of rigid method to do as she wishes.”

With her hands crossed behind her head, Ubuki said in a leisurely tone.

Both Yuu and Shiika became silent.

It seemed like it was impossible to view this organization, the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau, with the logic of what Yuu recognized as the "Common Sense". Aside from that, everything regarding (Mushi)'s existence and Mushitsuki, as well as the Ubuki and Shiika that were next to her right, could not be explained with common sense either. Even though it was later that she came to realize this, Yuu began to become aware of the fact that she actually didn't know a thing about them.

The events that happened in the short time span of these 2 days were completely different from the past life she had lived. Living a life that repeats itself, going to school every single day, going to cram school to study, and then meeting up with friends afterwards...just constantly repeating this progress. And she herself thought that it was normal that this happens.

It would never change no matter where she goes. At least in this city that Yuu lives in; in this peaceful country, it should be like this.

Yet the truth was different.

Because of an accidental encounter --- she chanced upon the teenage boy that was lying on the ground. All she did was turn her head around; and yet she was entangled in a completely different world. Was that world always near her like this? Or was it because the instant she turned her head that the two worlds intersected one another? No matter which one it was, Yuu had stepped into the world of the "other side".

There had been numerous chances given to her to return to her original life, yet Yuu rejected them all with her own will.

Even she herself didn't know the reason behind that; but, in doing so, makes her feels like the world she had been living in until now was a completely different world.

"Hmm---"

Yuu shook her head slightly. Perhaps she had gotten tired already? Her logical reasoning seemed to have short-circuited a bit.

The past Yuu who had lived a never-changing life in this peaceful world no longer existed anymore. The only one that exists now was the other Ebina Yuu who's being hunted by the SEPB, yet still trying desperately to go to Ouka City.

"What's wrong, Yuu-chan?"

"Ah, it's nothing... Just thinking about something..."

"It's pointless for you to think any further on this! Just make up your mind and get done with it~"

"I don't need you to tell me that, I already ---"

Yuu suddenly stopped turning her head around, and gazed into the far distance.

Higano City was completely enveloped by a never-ending orange that expanded beyond the horizon.

The three of them were walking under the highway. And unknowingly, it was already sunset.

The scene of high-rising buildings surrounding them on the streets made them seem like a bunch of wooden blocks being piled together. The appearance of the city was also being rendered into a blazing orange red color by the dusk's glare.

Although it was a scene that could be seen just about anywhere, Yuu found it to be surprisingly attracting. For the first time in her life, she felt that the reddening sun was very beautiful, making one feel very melancholic.

Yuu's eyes suddenly became blurry.

It was then she realized she was tearing up.

"Ahh, Yuu-tan is crying again! Did you get scared or something? There there, there's nothing to be afraid of!"

"I-I'm not crying! And besides, it's not because I'm scared... It's because the sunset is too pretty!"

"Okay, from today onward, Yuu-tan you will be a Mushitsuki as well! Because you have been possessed by nakumushi!" [T/L: "Nakumushi" means crybaby. There's a Mushi in the term, that's why Ubuki using it to make fun of Yuu.]

"I'm not!"

Shiika also gazed at the sunset.

"Yuu-chan, do you like the sunset?"

"Eh? Well...I don't really like it particularly...but I don't dislike it either. I just felt it was very pretty...that's all."

As if she was pondering about something, Shiika fell into silence. Facing Yuu and Ubuki who tilted their head, Shiika replied with a smile.

"Perhaps it might not be there anymore, and I don't know if Yuu-chan would like it or not... But if it's Yuu-chan, I think it will be fine."

"?"

"I know there's a very beautiful sunset painting. If I could find it, I'll give it to you Yuu-chan!"

"A sunset painting...?"

"Yes, it was painted by Rina. Although I don't know why, but Rina only painted sunsets for some reason."

"Isn't Rina...that person called (Ladybird)? A painting painted by her huh..."

"Do you want it, Yuu-chan?"

"Of course! Please let me have it if possible!"

She was someone that a teenage boy risked his life fighting for after all. If her painting still exists, I would really want to see what kind of painting it is. Who exactly is this person called (Ladybird)? And what feelings does she harbor when she was painting the sunset...?

Upon seeing Yuu sparkling with joy as she almost tackled Shiika, Shiika chuckled happily.

"I still don't know if it's there or not. But if I can find it, then sure!"

"The thing that Shiika-tan wants, wasn't it Rina's painting?"

"Well, it's the other painting that I want."

Facing the sunset with their backs, the three teenage girls walked onto the trail. The tallest Ubuki was having the longest inverted shadow on the ground.

After they walked in silence for a while, Ubuki suddenly opened her mouth and started talking:

"(Ladybird)... that girl called Rina, what kind of person was she...?"

Although she had wanted to ask this many times already, she always missed the opportunity to.

"I remembered you said that she was...the leader of (Mushibane), right?"

Facing Yuu's question, Ubuki nodded. She had only heard before from higher-ups that (Ladybird) was the leader of (Mushibane), a rebel organization that consisted of rogue Mushitsuki that were not registered in the government's listing to fight against the SEPB. Other than that, she knew nothing else about her.

"Umm...I also want to know about her."

"Mmm --- If I remembered correctly, (Ladybird) was born at Akamaki City. From my impression, I probably had seen her only once. And that time I was pretty far away from her, so I couldn't really see her face that clearly. Even now, Intel regarding her was still classified as confidential matters! Seriously, she had died already, why are they still keeping it as confidential as if it matters anymore?"

"How about you Shiika-san? You and Rina-san were friends right?"

"Mhm, she's a very strong and gentle person."

Shiika gazed straight at Yuu. On her face, a slight melancholic smile could be seen.

"I'm sure, after you guys have seen that painting, you would be able to understand what kind of person Rina is."

Yuu originally had wanted to try and imagine (Ladybird), but gave up on that idea rather instantly. She was someone who had lived in a completely different world than Yuu; it would be impossible for her to imagine someone such as her right?

"Well then, what about (Kakkou)-san? What kind of person is he?"

Facing Yuu's question, Shiika replied with a smile that was different from before; a slightly happy smile.

"(Kakkou)-kun is also the same as Rina, a strong and gentle person!"

"Aha, you said (Kakkou) is gentle?"

Upon hearing Shiika's words, Ubuki threw a sarcastic smile that she rarely showed at them.

"Shiika-tan, are you serious? How could that demon ever be "gentle"!

"It seems like Ubuki-san really hates (Kakkou)-san...huh? Isn't he a Mushitsuki for the SEPB just like you?"

"Don't group me in a lot as that guy! Almost all the SEPB members hate that guy to the bone. Who knows how many Mushitsuki were forced to work for the SEPB from being captured by him...Well, it's probably more in number for those that were turned into Fallen. In my opinion, (Kakkou) is just the same as that woman...just a bunch of merciless killers..."

"T-That's not true, (Kakkou)-kun is ---"

"Wasn't it because of him that Shiika-tan was turned into a Fallen? If we were to chance upon him, Yuu-tan will definitely get killed for sure. Since (Kakkou) was known for being even more merciless than (Kasuou)-tan!"

Being threatened by Ubuki like this, Yuu felt terrified once again.

Someone that even Shiika was no match against, and even more cruel than (Kasuou) --- (Kakkou).

She had only thought about delivering the CD to him, but didn't think about anything after that. Even if she were to see (Kakkou) at last, would he really accept the CD?

Next to Yuu who began to have her same old worrying episode, Shiika was still trying to protest against Ubuki. But because of the height difference, she was being held down by her head by the taller Ubuki, being toyed around.

--- (Kakkou)-san... What kind of person is he...? He wouldn't possibly pop out of nowhere and ambush us like (Kasuou) right...?

No matter how many times she tries to imagine, she always ends up with a bad ending. Yuu also knew this was one of her bad habits, but she just couldn't change it.

Yuu gazed at the sunset, and closed her lips.

--- One more day left huh...

For the sake of keeping Intel confidential, the data within the CD would automatically corrupt itself within 3 days. Although they were not sure of the exact time when this CD was recorded, according to what Ubuki said, it seemed to be around yesterday's evening. Which means, she has to deliver this CD to (Kakkou) by tomorrow around this time or earlier.

--- I wonder... around this time tomorrow, what will become of me...?

Yuu suddenly had that question in mind.

Either she would deliver the CD to (Kakkou) safe and sound.

Or she might get caught by the pursuers, and end up getting killed.

"..."

Yuu tried to shake away the uneasiness and fear that almost enveloped her heart.

I've decided to come here on my own!

--- "Do you have something that you absolutely can't let go, can't forget even when you're this scared, and wanting to run away?"

She suddenly recalled the words Shiika had said.

I do!

Within her chest, there certainly exists such a feeling.

I want to deliver the CD.

It was for the sake of delivering that entrusted will to (Kakkou) that Yuu started this journey after all.

"It is...this place right?"

The three of them arrived at the place where they promised to meet up with Erii.

From the vast construction came the continuative sound of metal bumping into each other.

Next to the sign that read "Non-Employees are prohibited from entering", there was a billboard with "Higano Shopping Center Construction Site" heading on it.

On the other end of the construction site, numerous buildings with different sizes could be seen. There should be the main area of the shopping center right? At a far distance, an excavator making loud noises could be seen as well.

“Ah, over there.....”

Shiika pointed her index finger at a corner of the construction site.

Next to the shadow of a parked bulldozer, there was a tiny figure standing there.

“She really is a brat huh...”

Ubuki whispered in a tone full of caution.

Just as they had imagined from the voice they heard through the phone, the figure that was looking at them was a young girl. Upon seeing her clothes that was filled with heart-shaped patterns, Yuu widened her eyes.

She was the girl that Yuu had seen back at Akamaki City’s crossroad.

“Ahh, it’s that girl!”

“Yuu-chan?”

“She was looking at us back at Akamaki City’s crossroad! That’s why at that time, I subconsciously stopped walking.....”

“So we were already targeted by her since the beginning huh?”

The three of them cautiously approached the heart-shaped pattern girl.

“Doesn’t seem like... she belongs to the SEP... She’s not wearing the coat...”

Shiika whispered softly. Ubuki nodded her head lightly in response.

“I’ve recognized most of the faces of those who belong to the Central Headquarters’ combat squad, and inspector squad. There was no one like her in there.”

The distance between them began to gradually shorten.

Underneath the shadow of the bulldozer, the three of them stood face-to-face in front of the girl.

“Are you...Erii?”

Shiika asked that question first.

The girl gazed straight at Shiika, and nodded her head lightly.

Just then, Ubuki walked closer to Erii, and leaned forward to stroke the girl’s head.

“You’re even tinier than I had imagined! Well now, just exactly who are you? It’s about time you spit it all out!”

“.....”

Erii only moved her eyes to look at Ubuki.

In the girl’s pupils, a blue-white light sparked.

“.....! Ubuki!”

Shiika felt something was wrong, so she shouted to warn Ubuki.

The heart-shaped pattern girl raised her small hand, and pointed her index finger at Ubuki’s forehead. At the tip of her slender finger, numerous blue-colored butterflies appeared.

“This is the first time I’ve met you after all, (Karasu)...Of course you wouldn’t know me.”

Erii flicked the butterflies from her fingertip.

Startled, Ubuki was, as she tried to move back, instantly enveloped by the blue-white lighting.

“Ubuki!”

“Ubuki-san!”

Ubuki’s expression became stiffening-still with her eyes staying wide-open. Not just her expression, even the posture of her body trying to lean backward had stopped moving as if she was frozen by time as well. Her slightly trembling eyeballs that were staring into space were the only part that was moving.

Erii immediately pointed her index fingers at the other two that were trying to reach their hands towards Ubuki.

“I’m Horiuchi Erii --- I belong to the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau Central Headquarters’ Intel, Special, and Experimental Squad; a Hishu level two ranked member, codenamed (C). Hishu level one ranked Mushitsuki (Fuyuhotaru), and Ebina Yuu, I’m going to arrest you two.”

The girl who claimed to be Erii spoke coldly. That voice was no doubt the voice that they had heard through the phone numerous times.

“Wh-Why...?...”

Yuu took a step back as she subconsciously muttered:

“Didn’t you save us back at Akamaki City?...”

“...”

Blue-white lightings began to spark even more from the silent Erii's body. Those sparks gathered in the air, before turning into countless butterflies. On the wings of those butterflies, an English alphabet "C" could be seen. Upon seeing this, Yuu then suddenly recalled the image of a mocker swallowtail that she had been seen from illustrations before.

Just then, Yuu suddenly felt a force pulling her.

It was Shiika. For the sake of protecting Yuu, Shiika pulled her away from Erii.

"What did you... do to Ubuki?"

Hiding Yuu behind her, Shiika stood in a confrontational stance facing Erii. The usual docile Shiika was speaking in a rather hostile tone.

"All I did was obstruct the current in her brain a bit. Although it's going to take a bit of time to recover, it shouldn't leave any side-effects. This is a part of my abilities; because I have to come in contact with the target, that's why I let her get closer to me."

Surprisingly, Erii's response was rather straightforward. And because of this, Shiika was perplexed as to what to do as her voice became much lower.

"H-How did you...know our whereabouts---"

"Because of the CD that you took from (Centi); the data that was stored within that CD, is actually a fragment of my "Memory". Like magnets that attract each other, I was able to find out the exact location of those that contain such data within them... This is also a part of my abilities; even the Central Headquarters didn't know I have this ability." [T/L: the term "Memory" here, is being used as the computer language term.]

"..."

"I've answered your questions, now (Fuyuhotaru)...it's your turn to answer my questions. For the sake of having a calm conversation with you, I've come here alone after all."



The young girl was still using her mechanical-like tone.

“Please go back to SEPB, (Fuyuhotaru).”

The girl noticed Shiika gasped slightly before continuing:

“You should be fully aware of the dangerousness of your existence by now, not to mention you have the conscience of not wanting to hurt others. When you take a step out into the outside world, those that weren’t supposed to get hurt will be injured because of you. Able to come outside for the past few days, shouldn’t you be satisfied already? Please stop this wayward act of yours, and go back to the place where you belong.”

“...!”

Shiika showed a shaken expression.

“Among the many Mushitsuki, you’re the most dangerous one. Just by living, you will repeatedly hurt those around you...you should’ve realized that by now, right? If it weren’t for you, who knows how many people would be able to live on!”

Erii’s words, seemed to have shaken Shiika’s determination bit by bit. Shiika tried to open her mouth, wanting to say something, but could only close them immediately and fell into silence.

At the same time, Erii’s words caused a new emotion to emerge from within Yuu.

“What...are you talking about...?”

Yuu slowly opened her mouth and said that, causing both (C) and Shiika to look at her.

“If it weren’t for Shiika-san? What does that mean? Why...do you have to say something like that...?”

“A brat like you, what do you even know... Shut your mouth, Ebina Yuu.”

Erii replied disgruntled, yet it only caused Yuu to explode with fury.

“Do you even know what Shiika-san’s dream is?! Or perhaps you knew already, yet still say that SEPB is the place where Shiika-san belongs?!”

“If you’re going to obstruct the negotiation between me and (Fuyuhotaru), I will immobilize you as well! You’re not even a Mushitsuki, just merely an ordinary human that doesn’t know anything; someone like you should just stay aside and shut your mouth! Put bluntly...in this world, it is better if some people never existed.”

“Shiika-san said that it was her first time eating a crepe!”

Yuu shouted out loud. Even though she herself was unable to move due to fear of the girl in front, her mouth went on by itself and defended for Shiika.

She faced straight at the frowning Erii, and continued:

“Shiika-san said that she only had (Ladybird) as her friend! Shiika-san she is...so kind and gentle... B-But why! Why do you have to say things like “It’s better if you never existed” to her!”

“That’s because you don’t know ---“

“So what if I don’t know! You’re the one that doesn’t know a thing about Shiika-san!”

Shiika gazed at Yuu, surprised.

The originally calm Erii showed an angry look, slowly distorting her expression.

“(Fuyuhotaru), you will come with me right?”

“If I obey and go with you...What will happen to Ubuki and Yuu-chan?”

“...I promise I won’t hurt those two.”

The young girl replied as such.

Shiika looked at Yuu, before shifting her gaze to the motionless Ubuki.

“Or perhaps, you wish to see them getting hurt because of you?”

Erii’s one sentence, caused Shiika to waver. With an expression close to tears, she turned to look at Yuu and Ubuki once more.

“I...”

Shiika took a step further away from Yuu.

“I don’t want to hurt anyone anymore...”

“Shiika-san...!”

Shiika moved away from Yuu, and slowly walked towards Erii.

“I”

Shiika gazed sorrowfully at Yuu. While on the side, Erii showed a smile as she changed her cold stare from before into a sharp glare.

Subconsciously, Yuu grabbed the wrist of Shiika that was moving away from her.

“Yuu-chan...?”

“I-Isn’t...this wrong?”

Yuu pulled Shiika back, and glared straight at Erii.

“Why does Shiika-san have to go through all this?! Why can’t Shiika-san do the things she wanted to do?! She just...wants a place where she belongs, that’s all she ever wanted...!”

Shiika turned around to look at Yuu.

“And there are contradictions in your words! If you just wanted to talk to Shiika-san, then there should have been a lot of chances for you to do so! And besides...you attacked Ubuki-san without saying a word, who would believe you that you won’t harm us!”

Erii’s expression changed dramatically, slowly changing into a hateful glare at Yuu.

“Ebina Yuu...!”

“Answer me! Why did you tell us to come here?!”

“Erii...”

Both Yuu and Shiika gazed at the girl.

Erii was silent at first, before showing a ferocious expression that a normal girl wouldn’t show to glare at Shiika.

“...If only you had obeyed me obediently, I could’ve killed you without letting you feel any pain!”

Yuu and Shiika instantly widened their eyes.

“S-So you had planned... to kill Shiika-san from the start...?!”

“The Central Headquarters will never change the principle of recapturing (Fuyuhotaru)... I definitely will not allow such easy penalty! If you were to cause “him” trouble, I’ll kill you first and then escape from SEPB!”

Because of the intensified lightning, (C)’s charged sweater gave off even stronger sparks. Shiika lowered her head and muttered:

“”Him” ...?”

“So that means, the one who gave our whereabouts to the Central Headquarters was also ---“

As if responding to Yuu’s question, numerous blue-white colored butterflies appeared from within the hair of Erii that was dancing in the air from sparks.

“As long as I could deprive the places you guys could escape to, you guys will be forced to come here... That way, I’ll be able to kill (Fuyuhotaru) without any interference!”

“Wh-Why...?”

Erii walked closer to the perplexed Shiika.

Shiika bit her lips as she held onto Yuu's hand. And then, the two of them ran away from Erii.

"Wait, Shiika-san...U-Ubuki-san she..."

"Erii had said she would return to normal after a while... The only thing we can do right now is to run away..."

While running back to the trail where they came from, Shiika muttered:

However, Yuu showed an expression filled with sorrow. Although Shiika had said "we", in actual fact, she was running away for the sake of protecting Yuu. Even though she had already made up her mind to not become a burden... the only thing she could do was stand rooted to the ground when facing Erii.

The butterflies that came out of Erii's body came in contact with the nearby bulldozer.

The bulldozer was instantly enveloped in blue-white colored lightings, before sounding a loud jamming noise from its engine.

And then after that, the giant bulldozer began to charge at the two of them.

Because of it being so sudden, Shiika was frightened as she came to a stop. Yuu noticed that there was no one in the driver's seat driving.

--- "Yuu-tan you're not a burden!"

Ubuki's words emerged in her mind.

That's right, I'm not a burden!

Yuu shouted out loud within her, yet her two feet still refuse to move.

The figure of the bulldozer that was larger than them by a few times came into her view. Like a movie that was being put into slow-motion, Yuu could clearly see the movement of the bulldozer closing in on them.

--- *The sound of my heartbeat...is really annoying* ---

Within Yuu's brain, the calm part of her consciousness was telling her that.

--- *My fingertips are cold* ---

Yuu extremely-calmly analyzed her body's condition.

Her throat was running dry, and her legs wouldn't listen to her.

--- *Why?*

Of course, it was due to fear, and uneasiness.

--- *Why?*

Of course, it was because she was going against an enemy that she has a no idea of and their unknown (Mushi).

--- *But even so...*

I'm going to --- expose the enemy's identity!

"...!"

Yuu used her body to tackle Shiika's back.

The two of them fell into a furious roll onto the ground. The bulldozer that narrowly missed them, charged straight through the place where they were just at, and crashed into an excavator in front; those two vehicles fell to their side right after.

"Y-Yuu-chan."

Shiika turned around, and looked at Yuu who was lying on top of herself, protecting her.

Yuu raised her head. She probably looked really horrible right now from having an expression of her trying to hold back her tears right? However, she didn't have the time to care about any of that.

Yuu used her hands to hit her legs that were paralyzed from fear.

Move... Hurry up and move, my legs! Do you know how hard I worked to come here?!

The trembling of her legs stopped. Both Yuu and Shiika stood up immediately.

Turning around, they could see a flock of mocker swallowtail butterflies taking off from Erii's body one after another.

When construction vehicles came in contact with the butterflies, the blue-white lightings would first envelop them, before the sound of their engines running rang out loud.

"Shiika-san, over there...!"

Holding Shiika's hand, Yuu started running.

In front of Yuu were the main streets of the shopping center.

3.01

Shiika Part 4

Shiika and Yuu were running towards the construction area where many incomplete buildings could be seen.

The sound of roaring engines came from behind them.

Numerous unmanned cars came from that direction, chasing after Shiika.

“Shiika-san!”

Running up a dirt hill, Yuu turned around to look at Shiika.

The sound of the engines was approaching rapidly from behind.

“Mm...Mmm!”

Shiika ran desperately towards Yuu who had her hand out. After they jumped over the small hill together, the unmanned cars charged into the hill one by one.

“.....!”

Dumping wave after wave of sand onto their heads, the cars flew over them with blinding speed. All of the cars had failed to land properly; the cars that flipped upon landing stopped moving after crashing into one another.

“Ah...!”

At the other side of the black smoke, a figure could be seen approaching them.

It was Erii. There were more cars waiting behind the girl, their driver seats were all empty as well.

The cars repeatedly crashed against the hill, gradually flattening the mound out.

“Shiika-san, this way!”

Shiika and Yuu ran towards the shopping district that was still under construction.

Turning around, Erii had already crossed over the small hill.

Blue-white sparks continued to surge from the entire body of the girl with the heart-shaped patterned clothing. The sparks formed into countless butterflies, before flying off in different directions. The machines that came in contact with the butterflies, growled as their engines began to roar.

“What exactly is that (Mushi)...?!”

Shiika could not help but feel perplexed. Erii's (Mushi) was a type that Shiika had never seen before.

A giant excavator was closing in on them from behind with blinding speed.

Just then, the ground that they were running on suddenly became paved; the path was sandwiched in between many buildings.

"If Erii can only manipulate vehicles... then she probably won't be able to attack us anymore if we were to go into buildings!"

Yuu held Shiika's hand, and began to run towards a certain building in front. That building seemed to be the information center of the shopping district. The two of them ran full-speed towards the emergency exit that was open.

"Shiika-san, hurry!"

Being pulled by Yuu, the two of them charged into the central building's emergency exit.

"Ah...!"

The excavator narrowly missed them as it completely crashed into the emergency exit. Their bodies were sent flying into the dim hallway from the after-gust. The excavator that was completely stuck in the emergency exit stopped moving.

"G-Go up...!"

"Mm."

They ran up the staircase under the illumination of the emergency lights. Due to the fact that they had been running full speed, by the time they reached the third floor, the two of them were already exhausted.

Many doors could be seen lined up right next to each other in the dim hallway.

"What exactly is that person's ability...? How could she freely control the vehicles like that...?"

Sitting next to Yuu, Shiika whispered with a low voice. Yuu shrugged her shoulders while shaking her head:

"I don't think it's that simple. If she can only manipulate vehicles, then Ubuki-san shouldn't become like that ---"

Yuu stopped talking halfway.

In the dim hallway, illumination devices began to light up one after another. At the same time, an alarm rang out loud; the rolling shutters in the third floor began to roll down one by one starting from the nearest to them— completely sealing off the doors.

“W-What...?”

Shiika was puzzled.

The sound of footsteps coming from below was gradually approaching.

Just then, Yuu shouted as if she just remembered something:

“It’s electricity! Erii can manipulate electric currents!”

Shiika and Yuu hurried to the stairway and ran up, but after only a couple of stairs, they had to stop. The stair that led to the next floor was blocked off by a pile of cement bags.

It seemed like the higher floors were still incomplete; there weren’t any interior walls or hallways at all. Aside from a few poles, the whole floor was empty.

“At that time when she was explaining what she did to Ubuki-san, she had said something about the brain’s current or something of that sort... I remember that vehicles nowadays are starting to use electricity to control...”

“So the rolling shutters before were also the same?”

“But even if we know this, there’s nothing we can ---”

Stopping halfway, Yuu widened her eyes. Shiika frowned for a moment before following the direction Yuu’s gaze was fixed at.

Through the glass walls that were located at the floor’s two opposite sides, many cranes could be seen approaching.

The cranes swung their metal wires, tossing the objects that were hanging from their hooks into the building.

“Ahhh!!”

Yuu’s screaming was canceled out by the loud sound of glass shattering.

The objects that were thrown into the building by the cranes were small-sized excavators. Although most of them crashed into the poles and fell to their sides when they were thrown in, some of them did make it through. Those remaining excavators slowly turned their claws and faced them.

Facing the small-sized excavators that were closing in on them, the two of them were stunned and dumbfounded. It was only after they got a closer look at the machinery did the two of them notice that they were shrouded in blue-white currents.

The sound of their caterpillar tracks grinding the floor surrounded them. The claws that were stained in mud swung straight down at Shiika and Yuu from above.

Shiika and Yuu closed their eyes. With a sound of “Dong”, Shiika’s body felt a vibration tackling her.

--- And then after that, the sound of metal striking the ground came from a far distance.

When Shiika reopened her eyes, the first thing that came into her view was the figure of the information center building drifting further and further away. The strong beating sound of wings that would not lose to the sound of the furious wind flowed into Shiika’s ear.

“.....Ubuki!”

Ubuki was carrying Shiika in her arms, while beating her two pairs of wings. On their side, there was the figure of Yuu being clutched by her two tentacles.

“Ubuki-san!”

“Sorry to keep you waiting! Iya, onee-san was totally careless because I thought that the opponent was just a brat!~”

Ubuki said this in her usual tone as she intended to fly over the center buildings.

“.....!”

However, Ubuki suddenly changed her expression. She immediately changed her direction, and began to glide downwards. An object flew past them at blinding speed as they turned; taking a closer look, it seemed like a sharp-tipped arrow.

“We’re gonna take shelter, hang on tight!”

Ubuki stuck close to the ground as she flew horizontally, before charging into one of the buildings in the shopping district.

That building was an incomplete cinema. Flying across the hallway that was decorated halfway, they entered a large audio-visual room that had half of its chairs set up.

Ubuki flew past a big screen, and landed at the corner of the room.

“If we hide here, (Konoha)-tan’s eyes and (Toramaru)-tan’s arrows shouldn’t be able to reach us... So in the end, what exactly is that kid?”

“She seemed to be from the SEPB’s Intel or Special squad...codenamed (C).”

“Ah --- So it’s that kid! I heard she just recently got changed to Hishu! If she were from the Intel squad, then I guess it makes sense that I didn’t know her. Since a no-rank member wouldn’t be able to obtain the passwords needed to open data base’s Intel. But setting the combat squad and inspector squad aside, why did the Intel squad’s (C)-tan come here as well?”

“That kid said she wanted to kill me...”

“Kill, Shiika-tan, you?”

Just then, Yuu tackle-hugged the Ubuki who was tilting her head.

“What’s wrong, Yuu-tan? Were you scared? There *pat pat*, it’s already---“

“I’m so glad that you’re safe, Ubuki-san...”

Yuu who raised her head had a face filled with tears.

Ubuki’s expression instantly became stiff.

“Thank god...If something were to happen to you, I-I...”

Ubuki gazed surprised at the sobbing Yuu for a moment, before shifting it to Shiika who was smiling at her.

Ubuki’s expression was slowly distorting.

“More-“

Averting their gaze, Ubuki moved Yuu away from her.

“More importantly, we have to come up with plans on how to deal with Erii now!”

At that instant, Shiika noticed that Ubuki was injured. The blood stain on her shoulder was gradually expanding.

“Ubuki... Are you okay?!”

“Ahh, this? I grazed by (Toramaru)-tan on our way here. It is just a scratch, don’t worry about it! This coat is pretty tough after all; it’s capable of blocking slashes, enduring high temperatures, and much more! But setting that aside for now, if we were to leave the shopping center, we will definitely get sniped by them... What should we do...?”

“We have to think of ways to deal with Erii first... She seems capable of discovering our whereabouts.....”

Next to the Shiika and Ubuki that were exchanging glances, Yuu muttered lightly as she concentrated on trying to come up with countermeasures.

“How about we take our chances, and tackle Erii head on? If it goes well, we should be able to inflict some damage to her. Although she has a special type (Mushi) just like (Kasuou)-tan, she doesn’t seem have to anything that she could use to protect herself unlike (Kasuou)-tan.”

"B-But if we get too close, wouldn't she do the same to us as she did to you Ubuki, and prevent us from moving?"

"Hmm, you do have a point there. We can't get too close to her, but we can't do anything at all if we're too far away. Even if we wanted to escape, (Toramaru)-tan's arrows will be waiting for us on top. Seriously, I even told her to come here alone... What a liar, that Erii..."

"...Just like (Kasuou)..."

Yuu mumbled as Ubuki crossed her hands behind her head.

"I'm seriously no good against special type Mushitsuki! Unless I have the ability like (MinMin)'s from the East Central Division that can attack (Mushi) directly, I won't be able to do any damage at all... The only choice left probably is to attack the host herself."

"Attacking the host..."

Yuu murmured as she turned to look at the entrance of the cinema.

"(C)...is still not here. Why is she taking so long...?"

"I suppose she's still trying to get down from that building? Since we took the shortcut and flew down from there after all."

"I see... She's just like (Kasuou)..."

Shiika and Ubuki turned to look at Yuu at once.

"Erii is the same as (Kasuou)! Although their abilities are different, there exists a limit to their attack range...they must be in the center of the mist or electricity in order for them to attack. I remember seeing the charged butterflies coming out from Erii's body first, before she could manipulate the machinery that they came in contact with..."

"Now that you mention it, it really does seem that way. The other special type Mushitsuki that I know of; every single one is like that. Although they're strong from within their attack range, when they were against distant enemies, they had to get close to the enemies personally."

"I finally understand...the reason that she didn't wear a coat... If so, then we can use..."

Yuu who was biting her bent index finger suddenly looked up:

"U-Uhm... Although I'm not sure if this works or not---"

Yuu quickly explained to them the things that came to her mind.

Shiika and Ubuki both nodded their head as they threw in their suggestions and ideas, and began to plan their countermeasure.

"Yuu-tan you're awesome! How did you even notice these details?"

"Y-You think it would work?---"

Just then, from the entrance of the cinema, rang the sound of violent crashing. And then after that, the sound of engine roaring came.

"It doesn't seem like we have any more time to cook up another plan!"

"B-But...!"

The one who was objecting was none other than Yuu, who made up the whole plan.

"If we were to follow this plan, Ubuki-san you will... Please give me a bit more time; I might be able to come up a better plan than this...!"

"What are you still saying at a time like this? You're seriously..."

"Be-Because...! Anyway, please give me more time! That way, I'm sure I will be able to come up with a—"

Shiika suddenly held onto Yuu's hands, which caused her from continuing.

"Shiika-san..."

"Listen to me, Yuu-chan. I think that this feeling of wanting to do something on your own is very important. I've already told you that before right? When one truly faces the things they want to do, they can't overcome it just by themselves..."

"B-But..."

Shiika shifted her gaze away from Yuu to Ubuki. Upon meeting her gaze, Ubuki's shoulder trembled slightly.

"But, I think that it takes much more courage to trust others, than trying to overcome it alone."

Yuu gasped slightly as she saw the uneasy expression Ubuki had underneath her goggles.

"Didn't you tell us that you wanted to become stronger? Doing everything on your own isn't what it means to be stronger!"

Shiika gazed at Yuu once again as she said so.

"...I...understand."

Yuu nodded her head in response.

"Please, Ubuki-san! You absolutely cannot die!"

Feeling Yuu's earnest gaze looking straight at her, Ubuki could feel her heart waver a little.

"...Isn't that obvious? If I were to die here, all the hard work I spent on escaping till now would go to waste, wouldn't it?"

Ubuki glanced at Shiika, and lowered her voice. Her latter tone sounded as if she was talking to herself.

“That’s right, I still have things that I need to do. That’s why I will live on...no matter what happens. Even without Yuu-tan asking me, I at least know ---“

Only Shiika, who was being embraced in Ubuki’s arms, could hear her soft murmur. The two tentacles that extended from Ubuki’s back wrapped around Yuu.

The instant Shiika felt a slight breeze blowing against her cheeks, the three of them had already flown across the big screen.

Just then, a girl shrouded in blue white currents appeared at the entrance of the audio- visual room.

“(Karasu)!”

Erii spread her arms out wide with a grim look, trying to block the approaching Ubuki.

Ubuki held tightly onto Shiika and Yuu, and made an emergency spin. The three of them glided pass by Erii, and flew into the hallway.

“I won’t let you escape!”

Small-sized construction machines began to fill the entrance of the hallway. However, Ubuki was able to see a gap among the machinery, and charged out of the hallway in one go.

Like a bullet, Ubuki shot out of the cinema before landing onto the ground.

“Well then, I’m a go on ahead! The two of you, don’t get finished off by Erii, okay?!”

“Mhm, we will be waiting for you.”

Shiika showed a smile; this caused a wavering expression to emerge onto Ubuki’s face once again.

“...I mean you guys have to lure Erii properly, don’t get me wrong!”

After saying it with a whisper, Ubuki beat her wings and flew away.

(Toramaru)’s arrow immediately came straight at the soaring Ubuki. However, Ubuki dodged it by drawing an arc with her body in the sky.

“Shiika-san! We should also get going!”

“M-Mm.”

The construction machinery army led by (C) was closing in from behind.

Shiika and Yuu began to dash further into the shopping district.

At the end of the cement-paved sidewalk, a tall tower could be seen standing. The tower's top and base both had a hexahedral form; with a sphere sandwiched in between them; a very modernized design. The sphere was supported by a couple pillars, and was covered in glass. It's reflection of the sunset's rays rendered the whole tower into a burning red.

"Kya!"

"Yuu-chan!"

A high-speed truck crashed into the street lamp next to the two of them. Due to the sudden quake resulting from the crash, Yuu almost tripped. Shiika held onto her hand, and continued to run forward.

The two of them ran towards the shopping center's entrance, gradually advancing towards a fountain plaza. Their goal was the tower situated at the other end of the plaza.

The tower's entrance was a vast hall, but the 5 automatic doors that connected to the hall were all closed.

"W-What should we do? The doors are all closed!"

Just when Yuu was troubled about what to do, a black shadow flashed past them.

It was Ubuki. While flying in the air, she used her tentacles to grab onto a nearby bench and threw it at the automatic door.

A hole was then blasted onto the automatic door's glass with a loud shattering sound.

"Ubuki!"

Ubuki immediately soared higher into the sky after that. But in that instant, the arrow that (Toramaru) fired graze by her neck, causing red blood to splatter across the sky. Because of this, Ubuki lost her balance.

"Ubuki-san!"

However, Ubuki somehow managed to regain consciousness and returned to her flight posture as she continuously dodged the arrows that rained down on her. Ubuki was desperately trying to fulfill her mission.

"Yuu-chan, Hurry!"

Shiika grabbed Yuu's wrist, and dashed into the tower.

Right after they ran into the hall, the construction machines crashed into the tower. The glass wall was shattered into pieces as vehicles charged straight at the counter one after another.

"Kya!"

A bulldozer narrowly ran past them, and crashed violently into the wall before it stopped moving. If it had moved just one meter closer, the two of them would've definitely gotten run over.

“G-Go up the stairs!”

At the direction where Yuu’s finger was pointing at, was a stairway leading to the next floor. The two of them crawled through from under the bulldozer, and charged straight towards the stairway.

Even after they arrived at the stairway, the two of them didn’t have time for a break. Shiika was pulled by Yuu as they moved up the stairs.

“W-We have to hurry, Shiika-san! If not, Ubuki-san will...”

“Mm!”

“As long as we are up here, the vehicles won’t be able do anything to us... In addition, the surroundings aren’t as vast as before, so she can’t use cranes to attack... We can also get away from Erii...”

Just then, the stairway’s light bulbs suddenly lit up as the air conditioner began to operate; a slightly moist atmosphere could be felt flowing in the building.

“(C) has already entered the tower...”

“It’s okay... we should still be out of her attack range right now---“

As if it were rejecting Yuu’s inference, the sprinklers on the ceiling gave off the sound of air escaping.

“Eh?”

Large amounts of water sprayed down from the sprinklers on the ceiling.

“W-What...?”

The water that sprayed down from the sprinklers instantly turned the two of them into drowned rats. Because there weren’t anything around to take shelter, they could only let the water downpour on them as it wishes.

“Why did the sprinklers suddenly.....”

“...-It can’t be!”

Yuu suddenly grabbed Shiika’s hand, and dashed to the 6th floor’s hallway. After surveying the whole floor in hurry, she finally found a spot at the corner that was not wet from the spray.

“Shiika-san, over there!”

Yuu tackle-hugged the dumbfounded Shiika, and jumped towards the only arid area.

And in the next instant,

A fierce “Biribiri” sound, akin to wet towel splashed against wall, rocked the whole tower. Blue-white lightning enveloped the whole floor that they were on.

In the nick of time, Shiika and Yuu somehow managed to escape the lighting’s fury. The action of jumping to a dry place had saved them from the danger of being electrified.

“Wha.....”

“It’s Erii’s doing! By running current through water, she wants to electrify us who are out of her attack range... Just like what Ubuki-san did to defeat (Ashitaka).”

“Y-Yuu-chan...look...”

The remaining sparks that were spurting out from the flooded floor began to gather, before forming into countless mocker swallowtails.

It seemed like the attack from before had caused the wiring to short circuit. All the lights blacked out in an instant, the sprinklers were also coughing black smokes. The blue-white butterflies began to join together like a bunch of ghosts.

“W-We have to go to places where there is no water!”

Yuu held Shiika’s hand, and ran back to where the stairway was by sticking as closely to the wall as possible, trying to evade the water puddles.

“There’s only a little more. Let’s do our best, Shiika-san!”

“M-Mm!”

After running up to the middle floors, the stairway’s design had changed. The two of them followed the spiral staircase that was surrounded by an outer cylindrical glass wall and ran up.

“...W-We’re here...”

The place which the two of them had finally arrived was an observation deck surrounded by glass walls every direction; a place designed for visitors to enjoy the view.

“Ubuki...!”

At the other side of the glass wall, Ubuki could be seen flying freely in the sun setting sky, desperately dodging (Toramaru)’s fierce attacks.

“Shiika-san!”

Yuu gave a sharp warning. The elevator, that was situated at the center of the observation deck, was about to reach the floor that the two of them were on.

“Please, make it work...!”

Yuu gazed straight at the entrance of the elevator, while muttering her prayer.

The most important factor needed to make this plan work, was the timing; there wouldn't be a second chance if they messed up.

"It's here!"

Shiika's whisper echoed the silence floor.

Accompanied by a weak electric sound, the elevator's door began to slightly open up.

"...!"

However, the elevator was empty; there was no one inside there.

"Ah...!"

Just then, Yuu cried a weak gasp. Shiika, who had also turned her head around, was stunned and dumbfounded.

A girl could be seen panting heavily while shaking her shoulders, standing behind them.

It was Erii. It seemed like she had feigned to take the elevator, but actually ran up the stairways just like them. Blue-white sparks suddenly emitted from the girl's panting body.

With a sound of "Dong", Yuu dropped lifelessly onto the ground.

"Yuu-chan!"

"Don't move!"

Being screamed at by Erii's sharp voice, Shiika stopped moving.

"I have only deprived her body's movement just like what I did to (Karasu) from before... But, if you dare to do anything suspicious, I'll instantly destroy her brain completely!"

Erii shouted with a tone that was full of hostility, totally unlike a girl at her age would say. The currents enveloping her body were sparking restlessly.

Upon seeing Erii's pale face, Shiika knew something was wrong. Perhaps it was due to the fact that she was over using her ability? The girl's pupils were slowly losing their luster.

"Don't move, (Fuyuhotaru)... I'll free you right away..."

"S-Stop it! If you're continuing to use your ability like this, you will ---"

Even though Shiika was telling her that, Erii completely ignored her. She gradually shortened the distance between her and Shiika, while deep-breathing to stabilize her panting.

“Ugh...”

Erii sounded a weak moan as she dropped to her knees. Her consciousness was starting to become blurred.

“Are you ok---?!”

“Don’t...move...!”

Erii raised her right hand that was shrouded in currents, and stopped Shiika from getting closer to her. Even though her eyes were only half-opened, she still glared at Shiika with a look full of hatred.

“Why.....”

Shiika bit her lips.

It didn’t seem like Erii was just an assassin; for some reason, she seemed to hold some resentment towards Shiika.

The act of helping Shiika back at Akamaki City also seemed to be caused by this resentment.

However, Shiika just couldn’t figure it out; what were the reasons that caused Erii to hate her this much?

“Why...did you have to go this far just to kill me? Is it because it’s SEPB’s order...?”

“It’s because...you’re...a hindrance...!”

Erii showed a furious expression, as she continued:

“The reason that I was able to put up with all of these...was because he is here! How could you cause him even more trouble than you already have?! For the past 4 years, you have been binding him, isn’t that enough already...?!”

“...H-He?...What are you talking about?”

Upon seeing Shiika locking her eyebrows, Erii clenched her teeth even harder.

“You won’t know... No one knows... Only I know...!”

The words that came out from the girl’s mouth were becoming more and more absurd.

To Mushitsuki in general, there wasn’t anything more dangerous than continuously overusing their (Mushi)’s ability. Erii seemed to have fallen into a chaotic state, and couldn’t even think straight anymore.

“Erii, stop it!”

“If it weren’t for you...!”

Blue-white butterflies suddenly appeared on Erii's fingertip.

Just then, Shiika shouted out loud:

"Ubuki!"

Erii immediately widened her eyes as if she came to realize something, before turning her head to the side.

Through the glass wall, 2 pairs of black wings could be seen straight at her, before soaring upward slowly.

--- During the time span Shiika and Yuu were luring (C) into the tower and isolating her. It was Ubuki's mission to provoke (Toramaru); constantly dodging his attack and distracting him, so that he couldn't see his comrade Erii's position.

Ubuki soared higher into the sky, and moved out of the way.

In place of Ubuki, numerous sharp arrows that were shining brightly could be seen flying straight at her direction.

"(Toramaru)..."

Erii aimed her index finger at the direction of the glass wall the instant when the arrows scattered the glass and entered the observation deck.

"This kind of attack...!"

Numerous charged mocker swallowtails appeared onto the girl's fingertip and took flight.

The instant the high-speeding arrow came in contact with the butterflies, they were enveloped in a bright light before being blown into pieces by thunderous lightning strikes, causing a storm to rage within the observation deck.

"Haa... Haa... I don't have much time... (Konoha) and (Toramaru)'s team should've found this place by now..."

After the storm had calmed down, Erii glared at Shiika once again as more blue-white sparks began to gather in front of her fingertip.

"Do you think that alone was enough to kill me? (Fuyuhotaru)."

"We're not gonna kill you~ we just wanna teach you a good lesson!"

Just then, Ubuki's voice suddenly came from above Erii.

"...!"

It seemed like Ubuki had snuck into the observation deck the moment the glass wall was scattered. She de-fused from her (Mushi) in the midair, and used her long coat to wrap around Erii.

“Wha...!”

“SEPB’s coat is pretty convenient! It can resist almost everything, of course, that includes electricity!”

Without giving Erii a chance to escape, a raven dragonfly descended onto the long coat wrapping around the girl. When Ubuki touched the raven dragonfly, it began to fuse as one with the long coat.

“Uh...This...kind of...!”

Although the girl struggled desperately, the long coat didn’t even budge. Within the long coat, intense sparks could be heard being emitted.

The currents surrounding Erii was blocked off by the long coat, interrupting it from connecting to the outside world. The lights in the observation deck were starting to black out.

And this, was also the sign of the victory.

“Uh...Mm! Mmm...!”

However, Erii still didn’t give up struggling; she was also biting her lips contritely. Large tears began to fall down from her eyes as she continued to resist.

Shiika and Ubuki quietly observed the girl’s resistance. Due to the injuries from (Toramaru)’s attacks, numerous bloodstains could be seen on Ubuki’s sweater.

“...Why...?”

Shiika kneeled down next to Erii as she asked that. The girl stopped her struggling, and stared at Shiika with her tearful eyes.

“Why do you hate me this much?...Who is “he” that you’re talking about...?”

Erii was still putting up a hostile expression, refusing to answer. She seemed to be relying on her will to barely sustain her consciousness; it felt as if she was going to collapse very soon.

Suddenly, Erii shifted her eyes that seemed as if they were about to close to look at Shiika. On the girl’s face, new tears appeared.

“(Fuyuhotaru)... I beg you... go back to SEPB...”

Shiika bit her lips tightly.

“If you were to leave...then he would no longer...have a reason to stay in SEPB... Please, I beg you... don’t deprive him from us... He is our...we Mushitsuki’s only...”

“.....”

Shiika could only watch Erii slowly close her eyes, unable to give any response in time.

Ubuki took the long coat off the Erii who had finally lost her consciousness, and put it onto herself.

"She over-used her ability a bit too much; I don't think she will be able to move for a short period of time. Well, we should consider ourselves lucky that we didn't have to go through the pinch of her maturation right? Hehe."

After a while, Yuu regained her consciousness and woke up.

“Yuu-chan, are you okay?”

Shiika helped Yuu to stand up.

Yuu took a look at her surroundings with a dreamily look, and became still from trying to remember what had just happened. Yet the instant she saw Ubuki's figure, she immediately showed a joyful smile.

“Ubuki-san! You were okay! Thank god!”

Upon seeing Yuu cry from being overjoyed, although Ubuki was still perplexed, her expression began to gradually soften.

“It's because the plan that Yuu-tan came up had successfully worked! Onee-san was thinking if I should pat your head, and give you a hug to praise you?---. But the Yuu-tan now covered in sand and water is so dirty, so let's forget about that.”

“I-I'm not dirty at all!”

“Hehe.”

“Ah...Where's Erii? What happened to her?”

“She's over there sleeping!”

Upon seeing the unconscious Erii on the floor, Yuu screamed “Kya!” as she jumped back three steps.

“It's fine now. Everything went the way we had planned.”

“...Eh?”

“And it's all because of Yuu-chan's hard work, thank you.”

After Shiika said that line with a smile, Yuu finally showed an expression of relief.

“Oh, that's right. (C) had also said this, we don't have much time left! (Konoha)-tan and (Toramaru)-tan's team will be here along with other squads very soon, we have get out of here as soon as possible.

During this time, as long as we don't fly, I think we should be able to get away by moving behind the buildings."

"Eh? L-Let's get going then!"

"What's wrong, Shiika-tan?"

Ubuki and Yuu turned around to look at the Shiika who had been gazing at them in silence for a while.

"We...made it through!"

Shiika showed a bright smile.

Ubuki and Yuu exchanged glances at each other before shouting:

"Yeah!"

"Of course, isn't that obvious?"

The three of them smiled at each other.

Higano City's night, was just beginning to fall.

On the county road that connected Akamaki City, Higano City, and Ouka City, there were the figures of Shiika and the others.

Different from the national highway that was parallel right next to it, the sparse county road in the night was rather dark due to its low number of road lights.

Hence, the sound of teenage girls whispering to each other in the dark seemed louder than usual.

“Eh, I-I have to do it?! Wouldn’t Ubuki-san be more suitable than me for this...?”

“I’m tired ~! Not to mention my feet hurts from all that walking, and I’m hungry too! Yuu-tan you’re my slave, so you should listen obediently to what your master said and just do it!”

“Uuu.....”

“Um... How about I do it?---”

“Shiika-tan you look like you would just get run over, so no.”

“...I-I think so too...”

“Get run over...”

The three of them quickly came to an agreement.

Yuu timidly walked closer towards the dark county road, waiting by the road for cars to pass by.

Very soon, a car with its headlights shining brightly came straight in her direction.

“Yuu-tan, do it now!”

“O-Okay!”

Yuu flattened her arm straight outward, and lifted her thumb.

The headlights immediately caught Yuu’s moving figure. However, the car didn’t decrease speed at all; it sped past Yuu and left her in the dust.

Silence and darkness enveloped the surrounding once again.

“Yuu-tan you wack! You have to act more sexy!”

Ubuki, who was sitting on the floor, began to pout while complaining. She was holding the goggles wrapped in her long coat in her arms.

“P-Please don’t ask for the impossible!”

“Um...I---“

“Shiika-tan, you wouldn’t be able to do it.”

“...”

Finally, another car appeared.

Although Yuu raised her hand up this time as well, the car still didn’t stop.

‘If we take too long, it will be a game over should someone go and call the police! We have to stop the next car no matter what!’

Facing Ubuki’s urging, Shiika and Yuu both showed a helpless look.

Their current whereabouts was a place that was even further away from Ouka City than the shopping center from before.

Although they have obtained from Erii the positions of the pursuers situated in Higano City, it only made them advance further and further away from Ouka City. For the sake of evading the pursuers, they were forced to stay away from Ouka City, not being able to get close at all.

Not to mention, it was already late at night. Yet compared to where they started off this morning, they were even further away from Ouka City. Their goal of wanting to arrive at Ouka City before tomorrow night was now even more impossible than ever.

Because of this, the three of them were trying to come up with an ultimate plan to overcome this impossibility.

And that plan was, asking for a ride.

Doing this sort of thing when they were currently being targeted was no doubt, a big gamble. If anyone were to report them to the police, the news would most likely be picked up by the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau. Or perhaps if they were even more unlucky, they might chance upon the enemy’s supporters; that would also mean a game over.

“...Please...make it stop...”

Yuu’s earnest tone was showing the urgency of the situation.

The possibility of arriving at Ouka City within the time limit was gradually dropping to zero. Unless a miracle happens, they would never be able to arrive there in time.

“Sorry, it’s all my fault for trusting Erii.....”

Shiika suddenly apologized with a whisper.

If they hadn’t promised to meet up with Erii at the shopping center, they should’ve reached the border of Ouka City by now.

“It’s not Shiika-tan’s fault! Besides, we didn’t really have a choice back then.”

“Y-Yeah! Not to mention, we have also obtained the enemies’ location in exchange.....”

Ubuki replied in her usual easy-going tone as Yuu turned around to look at Shiika.

Although they were being very considerate trying to comfort her, Shiika was still putting up a gloomy look.

--- I beg you... don’t deprive him away from us...

That girl had indeed said that.

“Him”---? Who is him? I’ve never thought of depriving anyone ---

Noticing that Shiika was hanging her head low pondering, Ubuki whispered:

“Don’t be too concerned about what Erii-tan said!”

As if she had seen through Shiika’s mind, Ubuki said that as she moved her face closer.

“Eh, Erii? Did she say something?”

“It’s not something that kid should know! Right, Shiika-tan?”

“S-Stop treating me like a kid!”

“Mm... Thank you, Ubuki.”

Shiika showed a weak smile. This caused Ubuki to suddenly startle for a bit, before instantly turning away to avert her gaze.

“I-It’s not like I’m worrying about you or anything, okay?!”

After saying that, Shiika and Ubuki fell into silence once again.

Perhaps, it was due to the reason of them being too overwhelmed with fatigue, the girls stopped talking after that.

--- After escaping from SEPB's pursuit, what am I going to do next?

She'd recalled the drawing that Rina left behind, and came here without giving a second thought. But after obtaining that drawing, what could she do next?

This question resurfaced in her mind once again.

--- I've made a promise with Daisuke-kun to meet again...But, before that day comes, where can I go?...

No matter where she goes, the situation of her being wanted would never change; not only that, she might implicate many more innocent people into her cause. Perhaps, just like what Erii had said, going back to the SEPB might in fact be a ---

Just when Shiika was pondering about that --

"Ah! There's a car, Yuu-tan!"

"O-Okay!"

A newly appeared headlight was approaching in their direction.

Yuu hurriedly raised her hand up.

The strong beam of headlight shone on Yuu's body.

"Ah... Umm... Please stop---"

Yuu tried to raise her voice.

The headlight's speed was gradually decreasing.

"P-Please stop---"

Yuu abruptly stopped her words halfway through.

The reason for that was because she could feel the vehicle slowly coming to a stop in front of them.

And then, in front of Yuu, the vehicle completely stopped.

"It...stopped..."

The three of them raised their head blankly to look at the vehicle.

The vehicle that stopped in front of them was a huge truck; the length of its container was at least 10 meters long. On the side of its container, a big pink neon light heading that reads "Happy Valentine's day!" caught their attention.

"Valentine's day....."

Shiika murmured lightly.

The day when a girl gives chocolate to the boy that she likes.

The boy that I like---

Within Shiika's chest, a faint tickling feeling could be felt throbbing against her heart.

Just then, a short-haired woman, who gives a strong impression at first sight, jumped off from the driver's seat. Judging from her young look, she was probably in her twenties.

"What are you girls doing? Could it be that you wanted a ride?"

"U-Uhm...no...Ah...Y-Yes!"

Overwhelmed by the presence of the truck, Yuu stuttered.

"We want to go to Ouka City, is it possible to give us a ride?"

Not only did she not have the slightest fear, Ubuki's eyes were filled with curiosity.

"To Ouka City? We're passing by somewhere before that though."

"Ok, ok. That's more than enough."

"Mm --- Follow me then."

The short-haired woman brought them to the back of the container.

"...U-Uhm Ubuki-san...These people can't possibly be related to the SEPB right...?"

Yuu asked in a whisper, and Ubuki replied with a laugh.

"Does it seem like they do to you?"

"...It doesn't seem like...they do..."

The back of the container had a design that open outward left and right. And on the lower part of one of the two doors, there was a little door that allowed a person to crawl through.

The short-haired woman opened the little door and poked her head inside. It seemed like there were people inside. After talking to quite a few people, the woman turned around with a smile.

"Okay, get on!"

"Yeah~!"

Yuu shouted a joyful cheer.

"T-Thank you very much."

After blinking a wink at Shiika who was thanking her, the woman walked back to the driver's seat.

The three of them then crawled into the little door at the back of the container.

It was completely dark inside container.

"Can't believe there are still people asking for rides nowadays! How cool, I totally like that kind of thing!"

"Stop getting emotional by yourself over there would you? Nonetheless, wouldn't it be dangerous if they were to chance upon bad guys and get taken away?"

"Speaking of chancing upon bad guys, what about us then? Well, at least it wouldn't be dangerous for sure..."

"This way....."

Amidst the darkness came the sound of a few people talking.

The last person who sounded like a girl grabbed Shiika's hand.

"Come here....."

Being guided in the darkness where one couldn't even see their fingers, Shiika moved forward. Yuu and Ubuki grabbed Shiika's clothes, following right behind.

"Ah..."

Just then, Shiika's feet bumped into a hard object.

After that, she heard the vibration sound of metal clanging against each other.

"Ah, sorry. My drum is over there, please be careful."

Drum...?

Shiika apologized perplexedly:

"I-I'm sorry!"

"It's okay, don't worry about it... In fact, it might actually be better if you broke it. So that way, the stingy manager will buy him a new one."

"You idiot, that's not the problem here okay?"

The sound of three boys talking could be heard coming from the side.

After walking deeper into the container, the tenuous girl voice spoke again.

"Here... It's dangerous to move around, take a seat..."

"Thank you."

Shiika sat down onto the floor after thanking her.

Yuu and Ubuki also took a seat right beside Shiika.

The truck made a loud engine noise, and began to move forward.

"Are you guys going to Ouka City? You don't have any money to take the train or something?"

"Could it be that you guys are running away from home? You have to cherish your family more!"

"What are you guys going to do at Ouka City?"

The boys seemed to have taken an interest in them, and started asking questions one after another.

"....."

Shiika and others didn't know how to reply, so they stayed in silence. After all, they couldn't confess to them that the three of them were currently being targeted.

"It-is-a-secret!~"

Before Shiika and Yuu could think of an excuse, Ubuki replied in her playful tone.

"Ohhh --- what a charming voice! Could it be that you guys are cuties? Oi, where's the flashlight?!"

"Idiot, stop making a fool outa yourself!"

"Shouldn't you be aware of it by now? It's because of these things you do that you're hated by girls."

"Sexual harassment....."

"What, I'm just joking!"

"Hehe, to tell you the truth, there're at least two cuties here, with the addition of a pet!"

Ubuki immediately merged with the people; laughter could be heard continuously coming from them.

On the other hand, Shiika and Yuu didn't talk at all, just merely staying in silence. Next to Shiika, Yuu complained in a whisper "Who is this pet you're speaking of huh..."

"Are any of you injured.....?"

This sudden voice that came from the side caused Shiika to shrink her body.

"I could smell the scent of blood...from you guys..."

The girl, who had unknowingly left the laughing boys and Ubuki, approached Shiika.

The smell of blood --- Although Shiika and Yuu only had a few scratches; Ubuki's case was much more serious; she had bled quite a lot, and it seemed like the girl had noticed it.

“U-Uhm... It’s nothing. It’s really nothing.....”

Shiika hurriedly tried to cover it up.

“Moreover, aside from that girl...the two of you seemed to be afraid of something...”

“...”

“What do you guys need to do at Ouka City? If possible ---“

Suddenly, the sound of music rang out; it was the sound of ringtone coming from someone’s cell phone.

“Oi, a message came from the manager at the front; she said it’s about time for the last meeting. Also, if there’s nothing particular, don’t bother the girls.”

“That last line is definitely directed at you dude.”

“In addition, there seemed to be checkpoints up ahead for some reason.”

A heavy and dreary atmosphere spread within the container, enveloping them,

Those were probably the acts of the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau for the sake of capturing the three of them. However, it seemed like they weren’t the only one that were shaken by this.

“What should we do?”

“The guys that had arrived at the scene will guide us. It should be okay as long as we get off the national highway and use the local county road.”

“Ok.”

They seemed to have come to a decision.

“We’re going to talk a bit about work on the side, please don’t mind us.”

“.....”

The sound of them whispering to each other could be heard in and out. Perhaps, it was time for them to part ways.

Suddenly, a hand patted Shiika’s shoulder.

“T-These guys feel...kinda weird...”

Yuu whispered timidly, which Shiika responded with a nod.

“Mhm... Can’t believe these people actually want to avoid checkpoints just like us...”

“Although ultimately it helps us in a way... but just thinking about these people hiding in a dark container like this...scares me...”

At the other end of the container came the sound of them talking and laughing.

“...First.....make it big...since it’s a guerilla...”

“But the problem.....Higano City’s...police...”

The sound that came over made Shiika and Yuu even more terrified.

“D-Did you hear that?! They were just talking about police...!”

"Mm---this does seem pretty bad, get ready to run whenever!"

Even the usual bold Ubuki had lowered her voice cautiously.

After driving smoothly for a while, the truck began to decelerate before coming to a complete stop.

And then, the sound of the engine running completely stopped.

"I-It's not moving? Have we already arrived near Ouka City...?"

"How's that possible...! You two, get ready to run..."

Just then, someone approached the whispering trio.

"Hey..."

It was the girl's voice from before.

A nervous atmosphere instantly surrounded them.

"We're going to buy something, is there anything that you guys want?"

"Eh.....?"

Shiika could not help but replied in a stunned tone.

"Are you guys...not hungry?"

"I want meat!"

Ubuki replied with a loud shout without holding back. It was as if she had already completely forgotten to stay on alert.

"I want meat! Meat~~! And juice plus snacks... ah, the juice; I want it hot!"

"Pork chop sandwich and the like should be fine right? What about the others?"

"U-Uhm... Can I... please have a bento...?"

Following after Ubuki, Yuu mumbled out the thing she wanted to eat.

Besides the meat buns that they had at noon, the three of them hadn't eaten anything else since then. Even if that wasn't the case, their stomach would have reached its limit already from all the energy that they spent on walking this whole day and the battle against Erii.

"What about you?"

Upon being asked, Shiika fell into silence.

"...Shiika-san?"

She heard Yuu's voice calling out to her.

Of course, just like them, Shiika was also starving.

But when she was asked what she wants, something else came to her mind first.

"...Shiika...?"

The girl suddenly sounded a surprised voice.

"U-Uhm...if possible...I want... a chocolate..."

Shiika said resolutely.

A silence immediately descended upon the darkness.

However, it was immediately interrupted by the girl's giggles:

"I'll buy a cute one for you okay?... ah, and a bento as well."

The girl left after saying that. The back door was then opened, causing light to shine into the container. They caught a glimpse of the girl's silhouette walking down the container.

"Chocolate?! Who are you giving it to, Shiika-tan?"

"Shiika-san you have someone that you like?!"

The other two immediately cornered Shiika.

However, Shiika was trying to fudge the questioning over by saying this:

"I-I-It's not that...!"

Daisuke-kun should probably be there at Ouka East High School right now...

But Shiika herself knew very well; it would only cause him trouble if she were to give this chocolate to him as (Fuyuhotaru). Besides, the promise to see him again was still far away.

That is why, she can't give this to Daisuke.

However, in Shiika's heart, there was another boy that she had on mind.

To apologize for all the trouble I've caused him... it'd be nice if he can accept it...

"Sorry for the wait..."

After a while, the girl came back into the container. Because of the light coming from her back, they were unable to catch a very clear view of the girl's face.

The container was instantly filled with the aroma of food. The girl distributed the food to everyone, before placing a small package into Shiika's hand at last.

"...Good luck."

The girl held Shiika's hand as she said that. Although Shiika was unable to see the girl's expression, she could feel that the girl was smiling at her.

The engine gave out a sound as it started running once again as the truck began to take off.

The three of them focused on eating their meals, and finished them off within 10 minutes.

After cleaning up the garbage, Yuu suddenly spoke:

"They are good guys after all! They even bought food for us!"

"Mhm."

"Mmm --- I'm very pleased~~"

Right after she finished her meal, the drowsiness suddenly descended and enveloped Shiika.

Both Yuu and Ubuki were also starting to doze off on the side.

Before she knew it, the sound of them falling asleep could be heard coming from the container's floor. Shiika leaned herself right next to them, and entered the dreamland as well.

--- After who-knows-how long had passed.

"The three of you, hurry and get up! Fast!"

A woman's abrupt shout caused them to wake up.

"...H-Huh...?"

The first one to have noticed the abnormality was Yuu.

"Why is it so loud outside...?!"

Loud clamors could be heard coming from the outside of the container shrouded in darkness. There seemed to be a large number of crowds rioting outside, and it felt as if they were just right next to the container.

"This is the end of the free ride! Come on, follow me!"

The owner of the voice was the woman sitting at the driver's seat.

Without giving a proper explanation of what was going on, Shiika was guided towards the door.

Just then, within the pitch black container suddenly came the heavy echoing sound of bass, followed by the sound of guitar being tuned, and then the striking of drums that shook one's heart.

"Have a safe trip ..."

"I don't know what you guys are going to do, but still, good luck to you all!"

"You guys gotta stop doing these kinds of immature things like running away in the future, okay?!"

"If it's possible, how about listening to our song before you leave?"

Just when Shiika and others were advancing through the darkness, the cheering sound of the girls and boys from before could be heard ringing.

While being guided toward the exit, Shiika turned around and replied:

"Ah-Um... T-Thank you so much!"

"No problem!"

Their cheerful voices came simultaneously. In addition, the girl's voice seemed to have filtered through a microphone, causing a loud echo to ring within the container.

"Until next time! And Good luck!"

As if the short-haired woman was throwing them out, Shiika and the other two hurriedly jumped down from the truck and left the door.

The place which they had arrived was a small-scaled shopping district.

The big truck that they were just on a second ago was occupying the center of a tilts-paved plaza. A large crowd consisting of teens rioting had completely surrounded the truck.

Just then, in front of the dumbfounded trio that was standing in a daze, the truck's container was split in two.

And in the next instant, an ear-deafening heart-hollowing loud blast came storming into the shopping district.

".....!"

The site was immediately overwhelmed with loud cheers.

The sound of the air-tearing guitar, the ground-resonating bass, the ear deafening drumbeats, and the melodies of the keyboard that united all these sounds together, were flowing into the shopping district.

The 5 teenagers that appeared from within the container were each playing their instruments as hard as they could, using the two giant speakers on the stage.

Amidst these 4 instruments, there was a girl holding a microphone. She had model-like slender arms and legs, and a faint smile that would burn deep into people's memory. She should be the one who approached Shiika in the container before.

"Everyone in Higano City... Happy Valentine's Day..."

The microphone-holding girl suddenly said this line in a light voice. Surprisingly, even amidst this kind of loud atmosphere consisting of blasting music and loud cheering, her voice could still be heard very clearly.

"C-Crawling Life?!"

Yuu suddenly gasped, causing both Shiika and Ubuki to turn and look at her.

"They are 'Crawling Life'! You guys don't know?! I-It's r-really them..! Oh my god... I'm so nervous...!"

"Ah--- No wonder I felt like I've heard this before...so it was them!"

Thunderous applause overwhelmed them in an instant.

Right after that, the female vocalist began to sing. The voice that the microphone-holding girl released echoed throughout the whole shopping district.

--- My name is Happy Valentine's Day, who should I look for this year?

--- I've decided, that one over there, the girl that's hanging her head low.

Not screaming, or shouting, just merely singing in a light voice. The girl's voice had no doubt captured the audience's hearts, causing them to immerse into dancing drunkenly.



--- What's wrong? Patting your shoulder ---

--- Is today a bad day, for the girls that have nothing going the way they wanted?

The vocalist on the stage was surveying the surrounding audience with a smile.

--- My name is Happy Valentine's day, how can I leave you alone like that.

--- Today is a special day, and you are a girl ---

The female vocalist began to spread her arms wide on the stage as the interlude continued to heat up the atmosphere, causing the audience' cheers to skyrocket to its peak.

--- Feeling sad? Depressed? Want to cry? Ok, I understand ---

--- Let's try to dance! To rejoice our happiness, watch me ---

The girl began to dance on the stage while singing; changing her shy smile from before into a bright one filled with joy.

"Comon!"

Shouting through the microphone, the girl called out to the audience. Not just the vocalist, all other members began to dance with smiles on their faces.

The atmosphere of the scene instantly reached its climax. All the audience began to break into dance, shaking their hips, and throwing their hands up in the air.

--- Let's sing! Let's dance! Let's be happy! Ok?! More and more---

Yuu, who was next to Shiika, had already been completely captured by the band's performance.

"...?"

Feeling someone looking at her, Shiika turned to her side.

--- Feeling afraid? Scared? Want to run away? Ok, I understand ---

--- Let's try to sing! To express our passion, watch me ---

Ubuki was gazing straight at Shiika quietly as if she was deep in thought. Just when Shiika was about to ask "What's wrong?", Ubuki's expression suddenly changed.

"Let's dance, Shiika-tan!"

"Eh?"

"Yuu-tan you too!"

Ubuki grabbed both Shiika and Yuu's hands, and dived into the rioting crowd.

"W-Wah...U-Ubuki-san?!"

"Ubuki?!"

"Let's dance along! It'll be a total waste if we just stand there and listen!"

Ubuki threw the long coat and goggles that she was holding onto to the side.

The slender teenage girl showed a cheerful smile, and began to break into dance. It seemed as if all the fatigue that she had been complaining about till now had completely disappeared.

The perplexed Shiika and Yuu were exchanging glances with each other.

"Okay okay, stop standing there like that you two! Come on, dance with me!"

Ubuki held onto their hands before continuing; the movement of her dancing to the rhythm could be felt flowing through her hands.

The crowds that were starting to gather in the shopping district all followed the vocalist's movement and danced along. Teenage boys and girls, one by one, flooded onto the plaza. In an instant, the three of them were engulfed by the sea of people.

--- How is it? Is that it? Is it not enough? I see, I understand ---

The strong beating of the rhythm, melody, clamor, and singing that would make one feel lighthearted and relaxed --- these loud sounds, were making one feel idiotic if they were just going to stand there and listen.

"Ahh ---! I-I don't care anymore!"

Yuu shouted despairingly as she joined the dancing crowds.

Feeling the movement coming from other two through her hands, Shiika became even more excited. Her lips slowly softened into a smile before she started dancing along with the other two.

--- You're not a replacement! See, there's so much happiness looking right at you ---

As the song reached its climax, the crowd's cheering and screaming intensified as well.

"Haa...Haa..."

The Yuu who was dancing while holding hands suddenly laughed:

"This is the first time... I feel so happy from dancing! Why is that?! Why do I feel like this even though we're trying to escape from scary people...?!"

"That's not important at all okay?! If we have to run either way, why not make this as enjoyable as possible?!"

"Ahah!"

The three teenage girls all laughed as they continued to dance to the rhythm.

--- My name is Happy Valentine's Day, thank you for your smile ---

Shiika looked up the stage.

And it was then she met the vocalist girl's eye.

The girl immediately smiled.

And Shiika replied with a smile as well.

--- My name is Happy Valentine's Day, who should I look for next year?

Behind the microphone-holding girl, an outline glowing with a purplish aura seemed to have appeared. Although it only lasted for an instant, the outline looked very similar to a certain insect.

It seemed like only Shiika had noticed this. She felt her body become lighter, and the pain coming from her injuries was slowly fading away.

"Shiika-tan! Jump a bit higher!"

"Kya!"

Ubuki hugged Shiika, and jumped high into the air.

"Ahaha!"

Upon seeing Ubuki's innocent smiling face, Shiika could not help but show a warm smile from the corner of her mouth.

Perhaps it was because she had noticed Shiika's gaze, Ubuki hurriedly put away her smile --- but she did not avert from Shiika's gaze this time. Instead, she showed a mischievous grin. She bent down, and picked up Shiika by her legs.

"---Heyo! Shiika-tan's big jump!"

"Ahhhh!"

"S-Shiika-san! It would dangerous if she falls down! Please stop it! Ubuki-san!"

The Shiika who was thrown up into the air flew to a spot higher than anyone else. After the surrounding crowd saw this, they cheered even louder. And then one by one copied them and started doing big jumps as well.

"Well next, Yuu-tan!"

"W-What?! You can't --- Kyaaa!!"

".....Ops. my hands slipped."

"Noooo!~~"

"Y-Yuu-chan...!"

Shiika desperately tried to fetch the Yuu who was being engulfed by the sea of people.

Just then, the sound of police cars ringing could be heard coming from afar.

Before they knew it, the guerrilla concert had already developed into a big commotion that required dozens of police to come.

The echoing police sirens gradually faded away from the nearby streets.

It seemed like the commotion which resulted from the guerilla concert had finally subsided. On the national highway, which could be seen from the deep narrow alleys; the patrol cars with the red dome lights were leaving one by one.

Ironically, the people that escaped first as the police came, were Ubuki's group rather than the members of "Crawling Life". After all, if they were found by the police, it would mean the same as if they were found by the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau.

The three of them continued running after that. By the time they reached the boarder of the Higano City, it was already midnight.

Taking into consideration the risk of encountering active pursuers during night, they decided to take a break for a few hours somewhere around the shopping district. After successfully sneaking into one of the closed stores, Shiika and Yuu fell asleep right away.

"Everything is going smoothly! I'll be arriving at Ouka City very soon, and when that comes, we will use (Fuyuhotaru) to....."

On a road that was a short distance away from the store, Ubuki whispered with a low voice.

"Mhm, there's no change to the plan..."

In her hands, she was holding the cellphone that she had been hiding all along.

"Mhm..... Mhm..."

After nodding her head a few times, Ubuki ended the call.

She then put away her cellphone, intending on going back to the store where Shiika and Yuu were at.

But a sudden burst of dizziness that came out of nowhere caused Ubuki to drop her knees onto the ground.

"Ugh..."

In the past few days, she had used too much of her ability. Although she normally seemed fine in front of Shiika and Yuu, Ubuki had actually already reached her limits.

Within her brain that was being eroded by a strong drowsiness, the scenery of the island that she grew up on flashed through ---

Followed by the image of her big brothers and sisters who raised her up like real siblings---

Those nostalgic windy yet sunny days, the clear sky, the fishing boats which floated on the sea ---

And at last, the figure of that young man who always sat by Ubuki on that hill ---

Things like war, I don't want to know anything about them ---

I don't want anything to be taken away from me anymore.

The never-changing joyous days, and the precious people she held dear --- Ubuki's dream, as well as every memory related to the island...were gradually disappearing away, bit by bit ---

"I won't...forget!"

Ubuki gripped tightly onto her pendant as she gritted her teeth. This caused the memories of her hometown, and the figures of those that she held dear to resurface along with a dark hatred.

"I won't forget... I definitely will not forget! If I were to forget, I'd rather die together with everyone at that time... That's why... I can't forget...right? ... Onee, Onii... (Sensei)..."

Ubuki clenched her fists on the ground.

"Only I survived... that's why, I have to get revenge for everyone's sake...! I have to make that woman suffer the pain that everyone felt hundred-fold. Even if that means I have to use Shiika-tan and Yuu-tan.....!"

Right after she shouted out that line, Ubuki became startled.

Shiika...and Yuu. She herself had clearly said that, rather than saying (Fuyuhotaru) and the CD.

--- Just by touching your hands right now, would make me feel at ease!

The words that Shiika had said began to surface within her mind, causing Ubuki's expression to become distorted.

--- Ubuki-san! You were okay! Thank god!

Recalling the sensation from being tightly embraced by Yuu, Ubuki's expression became even more unsightly

"No! No no no no! Shiika-tan and Yuu-tan... they are nothing but tools use for revenge---!"

Even though she was desperately shaking her head rejecting the thought, the smile of those two still remaining clearly within Ubuki's mind, and wouldn't go away no matter how hard she tried.

"B-Because... if they were to run away, I wouldn't be able to do anything on my own... It's impossible, for me to do it alone... Someone that's as dumb and as weak as me can't ---"

Ubuki's chest was throbbing violently as if it was being brutally grabbed by someone. The more that she thought about it, the more the pain would expand and ache against her.

Why did you guys have to wait for someone like me.....?!

She wanted to shout out loud, but the voice just wouldn't come out.

Feels... so... painful.

Ever since she lost her hometown, she had never felt pain like this before. The hands that were holding onto the pendant were trembling nonstop, and the pain that was throbbing against her chest prevented her from moving.

"(Sensei), help me! I don't understand anymore... If this goes on... I'll be broken before I can accomplish anything!"

In front of the groaning Ubuki who was gazing at the ground, an illusion similar to the ones she always had appeared, enveloping her completely in darkness.

Her hands appeared amidst the darkness.

The fingers that were opened, were trying to latch on something, yet all she could seize was void.

--- The fact that her hands could no longer grab onto anything, could no longer take back anything, she should've known it would be like this the instant she lost her hometown.

Shiika, Yuu, and revenge.

The wavering thoughts that contradicted each other were slowly tearing Ubuki's mind apart.

Within Ubuki's heart, a sense of emptiness slowly eroded.

But just then, next to Ubuki who couldn't think straight anymore, she heard someone whispering to her ears.

Within her mind --- emerged the best revenge that she could ever think of.

"I see....."

The illusion began to disappear in front of Ubuki.

Ubuki raised her head, and saw numerous black shadows that were flying in the night sky.

Those were the figures of (Mushi) that numbered more than a few dozen.

Ouka City was right in front of the direction that these figures were flying to.

--- I have finally thought of one, (Sensei). The best revenge... that I can accomplish...

Ubuki suddenly realized that she was unable to stop her smile from showing. The pain that was torturing her just a second ago had already disappeared as if it never happened.

“I’m going to make that woman taste a pain that’s far worse than living hell...using Shiika-tan and Yuu-tan.....”

In the sky above Ubuki who was grinning, countless (Mushi) flew past by.

4.00

Yuu Part 5

Bit by bit, Yuu could feel herself slowly changing.

In the past, she had been trying to solve every problem by herself.

Thinking that relying on others would only cause them trouble, and she also felt remorse as if she had submitted to her own weakness.

However, in the past three days that were completely out of any reality that she could ever imagine of, she encountered Shiika and Ubuki.

At first she couldn't bring herself to trust them, and also felt abandoned from time to time.

But now it was different.

Even though uneasiness and fear still lingered and pressured Yuu, whenever she was with Ubuki and Shiika, she would feel courage surging from within. The thoughts that she would never be able to accomplish anything would also change.

Just like this, the three of them would head to Ouka City ---

It would definitely be fine. As long as Ubuki and Shiika were by her side, Yuu believed that she could definitely fulfill her goal. She would definitely be able to hand the CD that the teenage boy called (Centi) entrusted to her to (Kakkou).

Shiika and Ubuki would never betray Yuu.

As for Yuu, she would also believe in them to the end.

--- I think that it takes much more courage to trust others, than trying to overcome it alone.

After hearing Shiika say this line, Yuu made up her mind. She wanted to change herself from someone that always tries to solve everything on her own, and believe more in Shiika and Ubuki until the end.

The three of them would each realize their goal.

However, Yuu never thought about anything after that.

That's right, after everything is over; let's go to the Ferris wheel together, just the three of us! I'm sure Shiika-san had probably never ridden one before. After that, we should go shopping in front of the train station, and eat Crepes together!

The Yuu, who was slowly entering the dreamland, was smiling rather happily from seeing the image of them walking together under the sunset of Akamaki City.

“Mmm.....”

Because of her body trembling slightly from the cold, Yuu woke up.

Outside of the windows came the sound of birds chirping.

Today seemed like a good day as well; bright sunlight could be seen sprinkling down through the windows that were dirty from dust.

Yuu and others had stayed a night over at a deserted store.

The floor was hard and cold. After getting up, Yuu could feel her joints aching in pain. If it were not the fact that she was too tired, she would never fall asleep in places like this right?

Yuu rubbed her eyes as she tried to find the glasses that she left on the floor.

“...?”

Eh, it's not here, where did I put it?

“I think that one looks better?”

“Yeah, I think so too, it would definitely suit Yuu-tan!”

From outside came the voices of Ubuki and Shiika; it seemed like they had woken up earlier than Yuu.

After Yuu walked out of the store, she noticed that the sun was rising high in the sky.

“Eh? It's already this late?!”

She had originally planned to just take a quick nap, but accidentally overslept.

Yuu hurriedly looked around for the other two.

“Ah...Ubuki-san---”

Just then, she saw a tall figure standing still on the road and almost accidentally greeted this stranger.

Due to the reason of the figure being so tall, Yuu had accidentally mistaken the person as Ubuki. But this person was actually taller than Ubuki; she seemed like a grown up woman. Because Yuu didn't have her glasses with her, she couldn't see this woman very clearly. All she could recognize at a glance was the fact that the woman was wearing a deep crimson red coat, and a pair of round sunglasses.

--- After the woman had seen Yuu. Perhaps she was smiling? Her bright red lips were curved slightly.

However, she suddenly turned around with her coat dancing in the air, and walked away.

Yuu gazed dazedly at the woman's fading figure, before suddenly coming to her senses.

There's no time to worry about a strange woman right now!

Turning to the other end of the street, two teenage girls could be seen walking closer while giggling to each other and chitchatting.

Upon seeing such a leisurely view, Yuu could feel a rage burning up within.

--- These two, seriously! Don't they have the slightest idea of what's going on?!

If they had woken Yuu up, she wouldn't have overslept.

Even though there are enemies everywhere, why are they still walking about so leisurely?

"Shiika-san, Ubuki-san where did you guys wander off to?! If you had woken up already, why didn't you wake me up earlier as well?!"

When the teenage girls saw Yuu, they showed a bright smile. While on the other hand, Yuu was putting on a pouting look.

"W-What's...wrong with you guys?...Ah, I almost forgot, have you guys seen my glasses? I couldn't find them when I woke up ---"

"Hehe, look!"

Ubuki took out the thing that she was hiding behind her back.

It was a pair of red-framed glasses. Different from the ones that Yuu was wearing before, this pair of glasses had thinner lens, and a cuter design.

"Eh? Huh?"

Ubuki put on the glasses for Yuu. The size of the glasses fit perfectly, and the degree was just right. Through the view that had just become clearer, Yuu saw the smiling faces of Shiika and Ubuki.

"Oohh --- Yuu-tan looks much cuter now~"

"Mhm, it looks good on you, Yuu-chan!"

"Eh? Where did you get this pair of glasses...?"

"It's a present to Yuu-tan from me!"

Yuu widened her eyes.

"Eh? W-Why...? A present for me?"

“Yeah. When I heard Shiika-tan was giving the painting to you, I was also thinking about what I should give to you as a present. Even though you’re not a Mushitsuki... No, even though you’re possessed by nakumushi and yowamushi, yet you still try so hard. That’s why, this is your reward!” [T/L: Similar to before, nakumushi = cry baby, and yowamushi = weakling.]

“I’m not a nakumushi---B-But, where did you get this pair of glasses... We shouldn’t have any more money left.....”

Even though Yuu was surprised by the sudden event, in her mind, she was taking their current situation into consideration. The fact that their funds were exhausted; she had already told them the night before in the store.

“Don’t worry about the small details!”

“O-Of course I have to worry! Don’t tell me, you took the money from ---”

Speaking it halfway, Yuu suddenly noticed something really unbelievable.

--- How is that possible, there’s no way!

Yuu herself was trying to reject the fact that she had noticed this, because it was just too absurd.

--- B-but didn’t Ubuki-san say... It was a remnant of her hometown?!

The necklace that Ubuki always hung around her neck --- was gone.

As if she had realized Yuu’s gaze, Ubuki desperately tried to show a smile, before putting up her hand to do a salute.

“Reporting to captain! The fund was obtained from a nearby pawn shop! It was a strange store that even allowed minors to trade; our whereabouts may have been exposed!”

“.....Why!”

Yuu could not help but tackle-hug Ubuki.

“Didn’t Ubuki-san say that... the necklace was given to you by your boyfriend?! Didn’t you say that it was a remnant of your hometown?! Didn’t you say it is very important to you?! So why... Why did you--!”

“Hehe...”

“It’s not something you should be laughing about! Why do you always...always...”

“When I saw that pair of glasses, I thought it might look good on you and I just couldn’t hold back! If I were to meet the person who gave me the necklace after I died, I will just tell him that I sold it!”

After Ubuki finished saying that line, she scratched her cheek with a lack of confident expression.

“This is the first time ever in my life that I gave a present to somebody...You don’t like it...?”

“...!”

That’s just so sly of you!

If you were to show me that expression, there’s nothing else I can say! Even though I still have a lot of things that I want to say to you, I can’t squeeze them out of my throat---

“...Something that’s this important... you wasted it on such a trivial matter, rather than saving it as funds for escaping... I just can’t believe you guys... Why do you always...”

“Yuu-chan?”

“Where are...my old glasses?...”

“We sold it, ahaha. Oh, by the way, the lens in this one was from the old one!”

“Ahaha... Just what... what the hell are you thinking in your head...”

Even she herself didn’t know whether she should be happy or mad right now. The Yuu, who was giggling like an idiot, was shedding big droplets of tears from her eyes.

“.....Thank you, Ubuki-san!”

Ubuki immediately replied with a smile.

“Even though we will not see each other again after this, Yuu-chan, you have to take care!”

--- Yuu’s heart immediately skipped a beat.

It was as if time was frozen in place. Through her stunned gaze, she could see Shiika revealing a stern expression.

“Eh...? W-What did you just say...? What do you mean?---”

Yuu couldn’t understand the words that Ubuki had said; she just merely gazed dumbfounded at the two of them in front of her.

Shiika and Ubuki gazed silently back at Yuu.

Yuu kept on waiting for Ubuki to laugh the matter off with a “Just kidding!” attitude as usual. However, Yuu never heard her say that.

When everything was over, the three of them would go to take the Ferris wheel, and then eat Crepes together once again.

The scenery that appeared in Yuu’s dream, bloomed in her mind like fireworks before instantly fading away, like an illusion.

4.01

The others

In the shopping district of Higano City's suburbs, morning started early in the day.

Perhaps it was due to the fact that their primary customers were people traveling between cities— only very few stores unopened with their shutters closed, despite it being very early in the morning. Not just the convenience stores, even the shoe shop and a store with a drape which read "pawn" were open for customers as well.

A teenage girl in a school uniform could be seen standing in front of the pawn shop's door. It seemed that she was on her way to school before she suddenly halted as she passed by the shop. After silently staring at an object in the showcase for a while, she stepped into the pawn shop without any hesitation.

It wasn't long before the teenage girl came out while holding something in her hand. It appeared to be a necklace with a golden ring attached to its end. Even though it was purchased on impulse, her decisiveness could still be regarded as impressive. The teenage girl, who had a complete poker face just minutes prior, now wore a big smile filled with satisfaction.

Someone else, most likely a friend of hers, called out the teenage girl holding the necklace. The teenage girl then repressed her smile and walked away along Higano City's sidewalks with her friend.

“(Kaguya).”

Gazing at the fading silhouette of the unaffiliated teenage girls as they walked away, Ogata Akatsuki turned around upon hearing someone call out his name.

A teenage boy ran up next to Akatsuki, who was standing at the exit of the shopping district.

It was a teenage boy of a robust build, with quite a big bag on his shoulder. He wore the same uniform as Akatsuki, which belong to a high school in Ouka City. Akatatsuki was also carrying a bag on his back.

“(Kabuto). Any news coming in?”

“Yes, but they are all uncertain...”

(Kabuto) replied in a calm tone, and sighed. His face and his tone both felt somehow mechanical. And even at such a time, his tie was still neatly done, suggesting an overly-strict characteristic of his, which was quite different from Akatsuki.

“I've got bad news, horrible news, and nightmares. Which one would you like to start with?”

Tentatively, he seemed to be trying to give Akatsuki a chance to make a choice. Even though it hadn't been long since Akatsuki joined the combat squad of the East Central Division, Akatsuki felt that he got along with him very well.

Due to the unusual actions of the Central Headquarters recently, Akatsuki and (Kabuto) were deployed to Higano city by branch director assistant Ishimaki. If it was internal strife only within the Central Headquarters itself, they would just have ignored the issue and left it alone. However, the turmoil stretched all the way from Akamaki City to Higano City, and was even gradually approaching Ouka City. The hospital which Haji Senri had been visiting on a regular basis was also in Ouka City. The Aim of this investigative mission—which was to prevent Ouka City from falling into critical situations; exactly matched Akatsuki's own desires.

“Well, let’s start with the one not so desperate then. Give me some time to get prepared.”

“Then I’m starting with the bad news. It is said that an insurgency has occurred in the Central Headquarters.”

“An insurgency? Who on earth would...”

“I obtained this information by great efforts, from an old friend of mine. However, I still haven’t obtained the details yet. Hence, I can’t affirm whether the number of rebels was one or three.”

“That kind of thing... Why not just contact the Central Headquarters to confirm it?”

"I think you have a better chance to see me going to school naked rather than expecting those people to release authentic information. Besides if the intelligence was that easy to fetch, then we wouldn't need to be working secretly like this these days."

Thinking it over again, Akatsuki had to agree with that. Maybe it was due to the fact that Akatsuki had little interest in the affairs of the SEP— ever since his time in the South-East Division; that he didn't know very much about these kinds of things.

“So that was the bad news?”

“Both (Kasuo), who has been in combat with the rebels, and somehow even (C) of the intelligence Squad, sustained injuries during the insurrection. Both are Mushitsuki ranked above level three... but I haven't managed to get in contact with either of them yet. I knew both of them before, and was expecting to get some intelligence from them.”



"Two members level three ranked members were defeated ---? Doesn't that mean we're in big trouble?"

Akatsuki's face distorted with shock, as (Kabuto) nodded bitterly.

"And here comes the horrible news. The Central Headquarters seems to be gathering almost all members of their combat squad to the borderline of Higano City and Ouka City. What's more, they've issued the command for the highest state of alert. We're also in trouble now. Our retreating routes have now all been cut off. If we did anything unusual and caught their attention, those guys would be attacking us without any hesitation.

"All of their combat squad members? Are they planning to wage war?!"

"And also, according to branch director assistant Ishimaki. Deputy branch director Goroumaru has gathered the East Central Division's combat squad at the border as well... You've got a point there... It does seem like they're planning to wage war— all of the troops from the Central Headquarters against the East Central Division."

"Even the East Central Division as well?! But we haven't heard of anything like that!!"

"That's because our mission comes from branch director assistant Ishimaki, not deputy branch director Goroumaru. And here's another tricky thing..."

(Kabuto) continued with his flat tone.

"Among the orders that the Central Headquarters has issued, there's one about retrieving the "CD". What's strange is that it is of an even higher priority than the obliteration of the rebels. That isn't the usual modus operandi of the people from the Central Headquarters."

"CD..."

"But in regards to what the CD was about Or who's carrying it, I haven't got any details about those yet. Anyway, situations have become troublesome. Now, even for us, the way back to Ouka City has become arduous."

"It's fine. We should head back to Ouka City as soon as possible."

Akatsuki stared towards the direction of Ouka City with a determined look on his face.

"Well, maybe you're right. Both deputy branch director and (Kakkou) have gone to the Central Headquarters in Akamaki City for several days already. So right now, there isn't even one high ranked member in Ouka City. I don't know what (Kakkou) has in mind, but I think he should probably be coming back from such an incident."

"..."

On hearing the name of (Kakkou), Akatsuki clenched his fists.

Kusuriya Daisuke --- The man who killed Tachibana Rina.

Akatsuki was once a member of (Mushibane) for the sake of protecting their leader, Tachibana Rina. However, his wish was dispatched by (Kakkou), along with Rina's life.

Akatsuki joined the East Central Decision for two purposes. One was to protect Haji Senri, and the other, was to defeat (Kakkou), in retribution for Rina.

“(Kakkou)...”

To Akatsuki, the insurrection was a rare chance. If he were to be left alone with (Kakkou) when the battle occurs... He would not hesitate even for a bit.

“And the last piece of news I have.”

(Kabuto) faced Akatsuki who had reverted his expression back to normal.

“You said it was a nightmare, right? What do you mean by that?”

“If what I’ve heard is true... it would be that...last night, one of the members accompanying the deputy branch director, (Nene), said to have sighted---”

“Sighted? Sighted what?”

“(Fuyuhotaru), in the surrounding areas.”

Akatsuki’s eyes immediately widened.

(Fuyuhotaru) --- She was someone who almost effaced SEPB only by the power of herself, and was also in the center of a number of battles which involved even (Mushibane) several months ago. Moreover, she was now the only Mushitsuki who had awakened from being a Fallen.

“But shouldn’t she be accommodated in the Central Headquarters...! Then...The rebel that the Central Headquarters is talking about is (Fuyuhotaru)?!”

“It somehow feels weird if we suppose that she is the rebel...But that explains why the efforts of (Kasuou) and others who tried to stop them all ended up in vain. Though, there’s a high chance that it was only (Nene) mistaking someone else as (Fuyuhotaru).”

“Didn’t that person called (Nene) keep track of who she saw?”

“Well... No. It seemed like she was arrested by the police shortly after that, and taken in for questions.”

“Questioned by the police? What was that all about...?”

“I don’t have the details about that either but...How should I put this...She’s, uhh, kind of unique.”

(Kabuto) shook his head with frustration as he started walking towards Ouka City.

“Anyway the only certain thing now is that the border of Higano City and Ouka city will probably erupt in fierce battles. The preference of the East Central Division, is to implement absolute defense. Before we receive any further directions from deputy branch director, do not attack no matter what occurs, and capturing the target is priority one.”

“Absolute defense...Is that possible when facing that (Fuyuhotaru)?”

“It’s possible.”

“...? Why are you so sure about that?”

“Cause I’ve been in actual combat with her so I know...Well, forget about that. Anyway there’s only one thing we should do now. Find out what has happened, and capture the crux of that. As for the Central Headquarters, they will probably continue their policy of complete obliteration of their targets regardless of what happens ... It seems like this will develop into guerrilla war.”

Finishing these words with his monotonous voice, (Kabuto) drew his eyes to Akatsuki. Akatsuki immediately nodded in respond.

“Let’s head back, to Ouka City!”

“Wha...? Eh?”

Yuu shifted her gaze back and forth between Ubuki and Shiika.

“You said we wouldn’t meet again... What does that mean?...”

“It means that the three of us will be parting ways here!”

Ubuki spoke in her usual laidback tone. Yuu then turned to look at Shiika.

“Shiika-san!”

Shiika pursed her lips tight, while clenching her fists.

While on the trip to buy new glasses for Yuu, Ubuki had already told Shiika about this. At that time, Shiika was also questioning her just like Yuu.

“Ubuki said last night... she saw the combat squad flying towards Ouka City...”

Shiika, who could not look Yuu in the eye, said that while hanging her head low.

While to the side, Ubuki was nodding her head while sighing.

“Yeah, that amount was like nothing we have ever seen before, no kidding! It seemed like the full force that Erii-tan mentioned had all gathered near the border of Ouka City. From this point onward, we can’t use little tricks to get across anymore.”

“No---”

Yuu interrupted Ubuki.

“No! I don’t want that! Didn’t we promise to go Ouka City together?! Didn’t Shiika-san promise to give me the painting that (LadyBird) drew?!”

Yuu charged into Shiika’s arms before hugging her. Shiika was also having the same feeling as Yuu; she didn’t want to be separated from Ubuki and Yuu.

“This is not the time for you to be wayward okay?”

Ubuki gently stroked Yuu’s head with a smile.

“Didn’t you say you would absolutely obey everything that I say?”

“Ubuki...”

“Shiika-tan, you too!”

Ubuki continued smiling, while lifting her finger to point at the direction of Ouka City.

“As long as you enter Ouka City following this national highway, you should be able to see the Ouka East High School on your way! As for Yuu-tan, you have to go to the East Central Division that’s on the other side. After getting out of the residential area, and crossing over a bridge, you should be able to see a building called the New Ministry of the Environmental Affair along the way. Although it seems like an ordinary government agency on the surface, that building is actually the East Central Division’s base. As long as you explain properly to them, they should be able to take you. The Central Headquarters’ pursuers probably have already arrived at Ouka City, so it’s best to not use any transportation. And since both of them were pretty far away from here, the chance of successfully arriving there within the time limit is probably around half!”

“Ubuki-san! Why aren’t you coming with us?! Have you already given up on us?”

“Yuu-tan, do you believe in the words I said?”

With her eyes filled with tears, Yuu strongly nodded her head in response to Ubuki’s question. This caused Ubuki to immediately show a pleased smile.

“What about you Ubuki? What are you going to do?”

The slender teenage girl immediately replied to Shiika’s question without any hesitation.

“I’m going to be the bait!”

“...!”

“I will divert the Central Headquarters’ attention as much as possible, so you guys have to finish your missions as soon as possible okay?!”

Both Shiika and Yuu were gazing at Ubuki dazedly.

“Why---”

Shiika’s chest was feeling a pain akin to being struck by needles. She had felt this pain before in the past --- it was when she saw Rina’s last smile in the Ouka East High’s classroom.

“But didn’t you say you were going to find help?!”

“Yeah, I just contacted them. They said they will come to Ouka City, that’s why you guys have to get to Ouka City before them. If we were to go there together, we will get surrounded immediately, and it will be a game over for sure. Therefore, I’ll be in charge of distracting the enemies.”

“B-But...! If you were to do that, Ubuki-san you will---”

"I will die, right?"

Ubuki scratched her head with an indifferent look while saying that. This caused Shiika and Yuu to become speechless.

"Shiika-tan, Yuu-tan, if I were to die... Would you guys feel sad?"

"Isn't that obvious?!"

"Of course we would!"

Both Shiika and Yuu shouted those lines at the same time. Ubuki showed a slightly surprised expression before switching back to her smiling face.

"Mmm, I got it. I won't die then!"

"Ubuki....."

"Now then, let me brief you on the operation mission plan! You two, listen carefully okay?!"

Ubuki held onto Shiika's and Yuu's hand.

"Shiika-tan, you're responsible for obtaining your friend's painting! Yuu-tan, you have to deliver the CD to (Kakkou). And me, I have to try my best to not die! If we were to make it, this will be our complete victory!"

"Hah... You can't even call this a plan... Besides, how are we gonna tell each other if we succeed or not...?"

"Mmm --- how about shout it out? Perhaps the other two might be able to hear it!"

"How's that possible?!"

Yuu, who was being held by Ubuki, was crying while laughing.

Shiika could also feel Ubuki's warmth, along with her heartbeat, flowing over through her palms.

"I...I-I still haven't returned the favor for all the things you've done for me Ubuki... Also, I haven't asked you... What do I do after I obtain the painting..."

"M-Me too...Ubuki-san..."

Ubuki narrowed her eyes.

"Of course, I didn't intend on letting you getting away just like that! For Shiika-tan... after you successfully obtain the painting, you will know."

"After I successfully obtain the painting?"

“W-What about me? Ubuki-san...”

“For Yuu-tan---”

Ubuki gazed straight at Yuu.

“You have to take care, and be a good girl!”

“...!”

Yuu could not hold on anymore; tears began to pour out from her eyes as she hugged Ubuki tightly.

Hearing the sound of Yuu’s sobbing, Shiika and Ubuki exchanged glances with each other.

“Ubuki...”

“Don’t worry about me! After the enemies have gathered, I’ll run away! You’re the one that definitely cannot be caught, okay?”

“Mhm.”

Through a view that would distort at any moment, Shiika tried to imprint Ubuki’s smile into her mind as much as possible.

“I hope that... One day... Ubuki you can return to the Island...”

Ubuki’s expression immediately darkened.

“Mm... That was originally my dream. But... the Island is no longer...”

“You definitely can, someday... both the Island and Ubuki, you will be...”

Ubuki widened her eyes.

“The Island too...?”

“Mhm.”

“You mean... you want me to return that Island to what it used to be... Aoharima Island...?”

Shiika nodded her head in response. Ubuki then lowered her head and gave it a thought.

“To return...that Island...to what it used to be...”

The teenage girl slowly raised her head before showing a smile filled with joy:

“Hehe, I just found a new dream!”

Shiika overlapped herself onto Yuu, and tightly embraced Ubuki as well.

“Thank you...Ubuki...I-I definitely won’t be caught anymore... That’s why Ubuki you also...”

“Thank you, Ubuki-san.....”

“.....”

Ubuki also tightly embraced Yuu and Shiika, before letting them go slowly. She put on her white long coat and goggles, and fused with the raven dragonfly. On the teenage girl’s back appeared two pairs of black wings.

“I feel really happy... that I was able to meet Ubuki and Yuu-chan!”

Shiika gazed at the two of them while saying that.

“Me too...”

Yuu added on while shedding tears.

“You have no idea how hard it was for me! Both of you are just so wayward!”

Ubuki replied with a smile.

“H-Hey, that’s my line! It’s obvious that you’re the most wayward one!”

The teenage girls broke into laughter at the same time.

“Well then... Congratulations!”

Hearing Ubuki shouting out that line, Shiika exchanged glances with Yuu for an instant.

However, the two of them immediately showed a smile afterward, because they understood what that line means right away.

At this moment, the three of them should only think about how they would fulfill their missions.

Ubuki would not die, and Yuu would accomplish her mission. Shiika strongly believed in them, just like how they believed in her.

“Congratulations!”

“Congratulations!”

Using a word that congratulates one’s success to replace farewell, the three teenage girls each turned and ran.

Shiika faced towards Ouka East High School.

Yuu faced towards the East Central Division where (Kakkou) was situated.

Ubuki faced towards the sky where enemies await.

The three of them had only one destination, and that was Ouka City.

Yuu was running desperately on the streets of Higano City.

There was no time for her to be alert to the enemies hiding in the surroundings anymore; even if it was just one second earlier, she had to get to Ouka City as fast as she could; to get to the SEPB's East Central Division's base, and deliver the CD to (Kakkou).

The time limit was this evening, which was only in a few hours. Because she didn't know the exact time, it was best to deliver it as fast as possible.

And there was one more thing---

"...!"

Upon seeing the countless dots flying in the distant sky, Yuu subconsciously stopped.

In other people's eyes, they probably thought that it was just the figure of an airplane or the like right? But through her red glasses, Yuu was very positive that those dots were a large herd of (Mushi). The dots seemed to have all flew in the same direction, presumably, in the direction where they were flying towards ---

"Ubuki.....!"

Yuu was intending on changing her direction towards where the (Mushi) army was advancing.

But immediately, she threw that idea outta her mind, and ran towards Ouka City once again. Even if Yuu ran to Ubuki's side right now, there was nothing that she could do.

Taking advantage of the time Ubuki bought by distracting the enemies as bait, she must get to Ouka City as soon as possible.

Yuu ran through a street filled with office buildings, before crossing the road in front; loud honking sounds could be heard coming from cars along the way.

Even though passerby's surprised gazes showered her, Yuu continued to run forward without stopping.

There was only one thing that she could do.

And that was to fulfill Ubuki's expectations. For the sake of their full victory, Yuu should only concentrate on running right now.

After crossing the main road, she entered a sparsely populated narrow alley; fully concentrated on running towards the entrance of Ouka City that Ubuki mentioned.

“I will definitely...deliver this to (Kakkou)-san!”

Because that was what Shiika-san believed in me to do.

The determination of Yuu wanting to deliver this CD, who was an ordinary Junior High student a few days ago, would not change despite knowing that there would be great danger ahead of her.

No matter who heard this, they would oppose it right? Ubuki at first thought Yuu couldn't make it, and even Yuu herself thought that this was nothing but an absurd folly as well. But, Shiika believed in Yuu, and even said “Thank you” to Yuu for accepting the teenage boy's will.

Ubuki also believed in Yuu.

Even though at first she didn't trust Yuu at all, after having gone through everything that had happened throughout their journey, Yuu could tell she was gradually acknowledging her. The three of them worked together as one and defeated the pursuers. At last, it was because Ubuki believed that Yuu could achieve this mission by herself alone that she decided to leave her, rather than abandoning her because of her arbitrary actions in the past. It was because Yuu believed in them, just like how they also believed in Yuu that she had the courage to accomplish this mission all by herself.

“I will definitely...deliver this to (Kakkou)-san!”

Just then, in front of the running Yuu, figures appeared and blocked her way.

It was a group of people clothed in white long coats and huge goggles; their special traits were so brazenly worn that she could never mistake them as someone else.

“Ah...!”

White-attired figures continued to appear in front of the dumbfounded Yuu.

“You are Ebina Yuu right? If you possess the CD, hand it to us obediently this instant.”

The figures in the front row began to walk towards Yuu.

Yuu's legs were shaking non-stop.

--- Are these people all Mushitsuki---?!

The group of bizarre white-attired figures completely surrounded Yuu.

“I---“

Yuu bit her lips in fear.

So scary, Mushitsuki are so scary, (Mushi) are scary, I don't want to get killed...

But now, there was something even more frightening than that.

If Yuu couldn't deliver the CD as soon as possible, not only would she fail to deliver the will of the teenage boy called (Centi), she would also fail to fulfill Ubuki's and Shiika's expectations. To Yuu right now, there was nothing even more frightening than that.

"I-I will never hand it to you guys! ---"

Yuu glared at the white-coated figures, before suddenly dashing into the alley next to her through the gaps between them. The white-coated figure immediately showed stunned looks.

She quickly made a turn at the crossroad ahead and ran at full speed.

However, a giant shadow suddenly descended next to her from the sky.

".....!"

Numerous (Mushi) came flying down from above and attacked her. Yuu immediately changed her direction and dodged the (Mushi)'s attacks.

The continuous evasion caused Yuu to almost trip onto the floor; she used her hand to support herself from falling and desperately crawled up before running at full speed straight ahead.

"What are you guys doing?! It's fine if you have to kill her!"

Hearing the shouting coming from behind her, Yuu could feel a chill running down her spine. But just this level of fear was not enough to make her stop. Yuu panted heavily as she ran towards the exit of the alley.

--- As long as I can get to the main road, at least these guys wouldn't attack me right?...

Holding onto her tiny hope, Yuu continued running.

However, the (Mushi) that descended from the sky stopped Yuu from dashing.

"...!"

Yuu immediately turned around, but the path behind was also filled with white-coated figures.

Because the alley was sandwiched between two buildings, a straight one-way route, there was nowhere else she could escape to.

--- I have to get to Ouka City...

Contrary to her desperate feelings within, the Mushitsuki were slowly surrounding her.

"I'll repeat again, hand the CD to us, or else ---"

Yuu distorted her face, and took the CD out from her pocket.

"I'm definitely not gonna hand it to you guys!---"

She grasped tightly onto the CD while shouting that out loud. Even though she could feel herself passing out from fear any second, only this CD, she would never give up no matter what happens. Because within the CD, not only did it contain the last will of that teenage boy that he entrusted to Yuu, it was also filled with thoughts of those people who Yuu held precious.

“I’m going to deliver this CD to (Kakkou)-san!”

In such an unexpected fashion, appeared someone who responded to Yuu’s shouting.

“(Kakkou).....?”

The voice was coming from above Yuu.

Yuu raised her head to look above, and saw that there were two figures standing on the cement roof of a building nearby.

It was a pair of high school students.

“What did you say about (Kakkou)...?”

“Tsk...(Kaguya) you idiot! Why can’t you just stay put? Can’t believe we were noticed by the Central Headquarters this early... This is the worst.”

The teenage boy who revealed his figure was immediately scolded by the figure next to him.

“You guys are the East Central Division’s...? Why are you guys ----?”

The words that came out from one of the white-coated figure caused Yuu to immediately widen her eyes.

“East Central... (Kakkou)-san’s comrades...?!”

4.04

Shiika Part 7

On the national highway, Shiika could be seen running desperately.

Above the roads filled with passing vehicles, was a road sign which indicated the distance needed to reach Ouka City.

Cutting through the pedestrians, Shiika panted heavily as she continued running.

“.....!”

At that moment, she noticed a long shadow which flew across the sky in the distance.

That long shadow consisted of a herd of (Mushi) gathering together, flying towards a certain direction.

“Ubuki...!”

It seemed like Ubuki had successfully diverted the enemies’ attention.

Shiika shook her head in order to shake away the uneasiness that arose within her.

--- Ubuki promised us, she wouldn't die!

Subconsciously, the question “How long have I been running like this?” suddenly appeared in her mind.

The fatigue which resulted from over-exceeding her limits, began to make Shiika feel light-headed. Within her head that was starting to feel dizzy, all kinds of thoughts flashed through before disappearing.

In the end, she was helped by Ubuki time and time again, whilst unable to do anything for her in return.

It was the same with Rina who also worried about Shiika until the very end.

Why did she only have the power to destroy? Not only did it not help the others, but rather it hurt those around her instead. To Shiika, who only wanted to find a place where she belonged, this strength brought nothing but loneliness... Why did (Oogui) give her such an ability in the first place?...

How’s Yuu doing right now?

Did she arrive at Ouka City yet? Was she also worrying about Shiika?

The time that she spent with Yuu was very happy, if she were to have a younger sister, it would probably feel like that right? But if that were the case, from Yuu’s perspective, Shiika would probably be an unreliable older sister from head to toes right? Not only did she lack common sense, she was also pretty

clumsy... When Yuu was angry for someone that was as useless as her, she felt happy from the bottom of her heart.

The time that she spent with Yuu was very happy. If she were to have a younger sister, it would've probably felt like that right? But if that were the case, from Yuu's perspective, Shiika would probably be regarded as an unreliable older sister from head to toe right? Not only did she lack common sense, she was also pretty clumsy... When Yuu became angry for someone that was as useless as her, she felt happy from the bottom of her heart.

Shiika felt that she was becoming weaker.

The resilience which resulted from her past escapes, was completely demolished when she was parting ways with Ubuki and Yuu.

--- This is the first time... I feel so happy from dancing! Why is that?! Why do I feel like this even though we're trying to escape from scary people...?!

--- That's not important at all okay?! If we have to run either way, why not make this as enjoyable as possible?!

--- Ahaha.

So happy. Even though she was still in fear of the SEPB's pursuit, the happiness that she felt when three of them were together was much greater than that.

Even though it was the same as the previous escapes, it felt completely different, and now Shiika finally knew the reason why.

"I'm not scared at all... because Ubuki and Yuu-chan are with me....."

She continued running, while subconsciously muttering that line out.

Through her vision, which was becoming blurred due to the overwhelming fatigue, the image of traffic jam happening on the national highway could be seen. There seemed to be checkpoints up ahead. Uniformed police could be seen carefully checking every vehicles.

--- *If it were just me, if it were just the weak me alone... I can't do anything...*

Shiika murmured within her heart.

After cutting into a nearby street, Shiika ran into the gaps between the buildings.

However, upon seeing several white-coated figures up ahead of the alley, she stopped. The figures stood close to each other as if they were discussing something.

Just then, one of them pointed his finger at Higano City as other members nodded their heads. Shiika could faintly hear “(Karasu) she... leave this area to the 3rd team...” coming from them. The white-coated figures suddenly turned around, and started running towards her direction.

Shiika immediately hid behind the buildings, the white-coated figures ran passed her without looking back.

Ubuki was trying her best. For their sake, she became a bait in order to lure the enemies away.

Shiika immediately returned back on track, and ran through the empty alleys.

--- If there were only me, I couldn't do anything... But.....

After leaving the area where there were checkpoints, Shiika began to dash once again on the national highway. Next to the road was the sign of Ouka City's entrance.

--- I'm not alone right now! Because of Ubuki and Yuu-chan's help, I've made it here!”

A nostalgic view expanded before Shiika.

A streetscape of high-rising buildings mixing among short worn-out buildings entered her view. The hooks of the cranes situated at the main streets could be seen hanging all over the place. The city was filled with the smell of a unique mixt of tide water and vehicle exhaust.

The city where Shiika was born --- Ouka City. The place where she had once lost her dream, but regained upon encountering Daisuke; it was also the place where she chanced upon Rina as well as where they separated.

“.....I'm back, Daisuke-kun...Rina...”

Shiika had arrived at Ouka City.

4.05

Ubuki Part 5

“Congratulations!”

“Congratulations!”

After deeply imprinting Shiika’s and Yuu’s smiles into her mind, Ubuki soared towards the sky.

There was no need to see them off, because she knew that Shiika and Yuu would definitely fulfill their mission. And as a result, Ubuki’s goal would also be ---

The streetscape of Higano City in her eyes was becoming smaller and smaller.

--- I hate the sky of the city...

Feeling the sensation of the polluted wind blowing against her cheeks, her pair of wings glided over the moist air current. Ubuki used to really hate the city’s sky.

But now it was different.

Her powerful wings cut through the blowing wind as a never-ending horizon expanded in front of her. It felt as if she was flying over the sky of her hometown; strength kept on pouring out from every inches of her body.

“(Sensei)... Shiika-tan gave me a new dream! She said I can take back the Island... and restore it to how it used to be.....”

Ubuki came to a stop in midair right before Ouka City.

Observing the whole Higano City, black shadows could be seen starting to join together like clouds.

Those were the Central Headquarters’ entire airborne squads; they began to approach Ubuki as if they were being drawn to her.

--- After this revenge ends, I’ll return back to the Island, (Sensei)...

Ubuki showed a shallow smile.

Even upon seeing the despairing scene of countless enemies flocking towards her, Ubuki didn’t have the slightest intention of losing.

Ah, I remembered!

After I get back on the Island, I’ll build a clinic first! So that way, no matter when (Sensei) comes back, I’ll be able to welcome him!

“And then we can go up that hill again...together... What do you say? (Sensei).....”

Ubuki suddenly lost her balance in midair. Her consciousness was becoming hazy as the memories of her hometown were vanishing away bit by bit.

However, she still put up a smile. Even if she was near her limits, even if her dream was being devoured by her (Mushi), Ubuki could still feel new strength pouring out of her body.

“For the sake of giving that present to Yuu-tan, I sold the ring that you gave me... but it should be fine right? Because didn’t you tell me this before?---”

--- I hope that one day, you'll be able to use this for those that you hold dear.

Ubuki could never forget (Sensei)’s smile at that moment. Even if her dream were to be devoured by her (Mushi) completely, she would never forget. It must be his smiling face right?

“I found my precious people, (Sensei)!”

--- Thank you!

--- Thank you!

Shiika and Yuu both said that to Ubuki.

But the one who really wants to say that, was actually Ubuki.

But since she couldn’t say it at that time, she might as well as say it inside her heart now!

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you for waiting for Ubuki.

Thank you for believing in the Ubuki who was deprived of everything, and had nothing left behind.

“I will never let anyone take away anything from me anymore! I will not let anyone take Shiika-tan and Yuu-tan away from me!”

With a deliberate smile, Ubuki overlooked the (Mushi) herd that was gradually surrounding her.

“Of course, that includes my life as well!”

Right now, she had the confidence that she would not lose to anyone. Even though she was just a No-rank Mushitsuki, and a dumb one at that, it didn’t matter. Because she had the world’s most faithful companions accompanying her. Their success, would bring Ubuki unlimited strength.

“Just gather a little more... a little more and I’ll finally have my revenge against you all!”



The airborne squads began their combined attack.

Showing a supercilious smile, Ubuki continued to accelerate faster and faster.

In front of Yuu, the white-coated figures were staring eye to eye at the two teenage boys.

---W-What's going...on?

She had thought of using this chance to escape, but the situation of her being surrounded still hadn't changed.

"I see, so the people who (Karasu) contacted were you guys! Does the East Central Division also want the CD?!"

"...(Kaguya), because of you, things have gotten really complicated."

Ignoring the scolding coming from his partner, the teenage boy called (Kaguya) opened his schoolbag.

A black-colored long coat was then taken out from the schoolbag. Although it seemed very similar to the coats that the Mushitsuki surrounding Yuu were wearing, including the goggles that he wore, they were all pitch black instead.

A twin-tailed (Mushi) suddenly appeared next to the black-coated figure's feet. The mayfly-like (Mushi)'s body gradually began to turn into a gold color.

"(Kabuto), I remember cleaning up problems that occurred between Higano City and Ouka City was also a part of our mission right?"

"But that's after we retreat back to Ouka City... Hey you over there, can you still run?"

The teenage boy called (Kabuto) questioned Yuu.

The originally dumbfounded Yuu immediately nodded her head a few times.

"Good then."

Just at that instant, (Kabuto) jumped from the building, and landed right next to Yuu.

"Run!"

Yuu's hand was pulled by him, which caused her to run as well.

Immediately after that, golden lasers rained down upon the white-coated figures surrounding them.

"Wahh!"

"Uhh!"

The ground upon which the white-coated figures were standing exploded, sending every single Central Headquarters' members flying. Their surrounding formation had collapsed because of this. The teenage boy called (Kaguya) and his (Mushi), descended behind the two of them.

They immediately ran towards the main road, following the path heading towards Ouka City. While cutting through the pedestrians, (Kabuto) raised a question towards Yuu.

"What exactly is going on? Can you explain why you are being targeted by the Central Headquarters?"

"I don't have much time to explain!"

"What do you mean?"

The (Kaguya), who caught up to them, asked the question.

"If I don't hurry and meet (Kakkou)-san, Ubuki-san she will...!"

"Ubuki?"

"She's trying to make time for me and Shiika-san right now! Facing a large group of enemies all by herself.....!"

Yuu could feel the teenage boys' expressions became solemn.

"Shiika...Do you mean Anmoto Shiika?"

Yuu nodded her head in response to (Kabuto)'s question, the two of them exchanged glances with each other immediately.

"(Fuyuhotaru)...so she really did escape from the Central Headquarters huh."

Just then, Yuu suddenly came to a stop.

The bridge leading towards Ouka City was having a serious traffic jam.

And it was because of the police's checkpoints up ahead.

Although Yuu tried to look for other methods to bypass, the river in front of her obstructed every other possibility.

"What should I do!! If I don't hurry and get to Ouka City.....!"

"Wait."

(Kabuto) suddenly grabbed the shoulder of Yuu who was turning her direction.

"If you only want to see (Kakkou), then there's no point for you to go to Ouka City."

"E-Eh, why? Isn't (Kakkou)-san at the East Central Division's ---"

“That guy is at Akamaki City right now.”

(Kabuto)’s sudden words, caused Yuu to black out for an instant.

“Eh.....?”

Yuu could feel her body was slowly losing strength.

For an instant, she couldn’t understand what the teenage boy in front of her was saying.

(Kakkou) is at Ouka City.

A fact that she had believed in until now; for the sake of fulfilling her goal, she had worked so hard to come here.

Accompanied by the words of (Kabuto) soaking into her brain, a bottomless despair suddenly enveloped her completely.

“(Kakkou)-san he... is not at Ouka City.....?”

Because of the overwhelming shock, her body began to tremble.

Even if she rushed back to Akamaki City this instant, there was no way she would make it there before evening.

--- *Ubuki-san... Shiika-san...*

The figures of those two teenage girls who believed in Yuu began to appear within her mind.

The CD that (Centi) risked his life protecting, for the sake of fulfilling his will, Yuu came here with the help of many people.

But she had never thought, after coming this far, that she would be told that (Kakkou) was not at Ouka City.

--- *W-What... should I do now...?*

The shadow of despair began to crawl onto Yuu’s feet.

Yuu, who was feeling like she would pass out any second, heard the surprised voice of (Kaguya) shouting next to her:

“Eh... Deputy branch director, are you sure?!”

(Kaguya) was talking to someone through the goggles.

“(Kakkou) has...come back to Ouka City already?!”

“...!”

Yuu immediately widened her eyes as her weak legs began to stop trembling as well.

“What’s going on? We’ve never heard of such an occurrence; what’s the situation right now?”

“Yes...Yes, I understand now.”

(Kaguya) turned to face (Kabuto).

“It seems like he returned back to Ouka City before the Central Headquarters surrounded Higano City. Right now he is currently holding the Central Headquarters in check near the border line.”

“It’s as if he had already expected the movement of the Central Headquarters... Well if so, why didn’t we receive any evacuation orders?”

“No...The situation was actually not what we thought it was turning out to be. According to the deputy branch director, there seems to be reports of witnesses regarding the appearance of (Oogui) around this area, that’s why she didn’t ---“

“(Kakkou)-san is at Ouka City right now right?!”

Yuu suddenly grabbed onto (Kaguya)’s coat.

There was still some hope. If (Kakkou) were at Ouka City, then Yuu must hurry to his side as soon as possible.

“Why do you have to see (Kakkou)? I remembered you said something about a CD---“

“I obtained a CD from a guy called (Centi)... He wants to give this CD to either (Ladybird) or (Kakkou)...”

Yuu’s words caused the two of them to suddenly change their expressions.

Especially (Kaguya), he seemed really shocked for some reason as he held tightly onto the hands of Yuu that were grabbing his coat.

“From (Centi) you said?,,, Why is he...? And, what can he possibly want to give to Rina now.”

Yuu was scared by the other party’s sudden change of look. It seemed like (Kaguya) knows (Ladybird), and even calls her directly as Rina.

“(Kaguya), calm down. It really looks like we don’t have much time to let her explain.”

After hearing that line, Yuu and (Kaguya) both turned their heads around to the direction where they came from.

Amidst the honking lines of cars, white shadows could be faintly seen gathering. Perhaps it was due to the fact that there were too many civilians in the area; most of the white shadows were just hiding behind the buildings, observing their situation.

“Well, let me slightly tidy up the story then. In conclusion, you were entrusted with a CD-like object from a guy who claimed himself as (Centi), and for the sake of delivering that to (Kakkou), you came here. You were originally together with a person called Ubuki and (Fuyuhotaru), but have already separated... Am I right?”

Yuu nodded her head.

“Where is (Fuyuhotaru) right now?”

Yuu immediately pursed her lips upon being asked that question. Shiika was currently trying to escape from the SEPB's pursue in general. Even if they were to tear her mouth apart, Yuu would never tell them the whereabouts of Shiika.

“Seemed like you're alert against us; let me change to another question then, as long as you deliver the CD to (Kakkou), your problem will be solved right?”

“Yes! That's why I have to---”

“Are you willing to entrust the CD to us then? It will definitely be safer than you doing it alone---”

Yuu instinctively distanced herself away from the two teenage boys.

It must be Yuu that delivers the CD. Because it was her that accepted (Centi)'s will first, and eventually came here with the help of Shiika and Ubuki, that was why she must deliver it to (Kakkou) personally.

The teenage boy called (Kaguya) showed a slightly reluctant expression.

“You probably didn't know, that guy called (Kakkou) is actually.....”

“He is just like a demon, right?!”

“...!”

“I don't care if he is a god or a demon! It was me who took the CD from that guy! And because of Shiika-san's and Ubuki-san's help, I've come here, that's why I have to personally deliver it to (Kakkou)-san! No one else but me!”

Yuu tried to explain desperately as she held tightly onto the CD, while glaring at the two teenage boys. She had prepared herself to escape any time should the two of them forcefully snatch the CD away from her.

However, the teenage boy called (Kabuto) suddenly heaved a sigh.

“I understand.”

A Hercules beetle then descended next to the teenage boy who nodded his head --- No, after taking a closer look at it, one would be able to tell that it was not any normal Hercules beetle. The long horn on its head was branched off into many sub-horns; and its tea-colored body was shaking nonstop.

“...!”

Yuu gasped with a startled look.

The Hercules beetle’s body began to swell up rapidly, before growing to a size that was at least three times taller than Yuu; its eyes were reflecting the sun’s glare.

The sudden appearance of the (Mushi) caused the surroundings to go into an uproar; screams could be heard coming from all directions.

“Get on, we’re getting out of Higano City right now.”

“(Kabuto)...!”

“This is something that the Central Headquarters values more than the recapture of (Fuyuhotaru), it is not something we can handle by ourselves anymore.”

However, (Kaguya) still seemed to be disagreeing with this as he clenched his teeth.

“Besides, this is your past comrade’s request. But, I just don’t understand why someone that has turned into a Fallen long ago wants to give this to (Kakkou) who’s their enemy....”

(Kaguya) squeezed his fists, while staring at Yuu with his eyes that were covered by the goggles:

“What’s your name?”

“Yuu...Ebina Yuu.”

“I’m Ogata Akatsuki, I don’t quite like this alias (Kaguya) given by the SEPB... Let’s go, Yuu.”

The teenage boy called Akatsuki carried Yuu with his arms and jumped on the back of the Hercules beetle by using its sub-horns as stepping stone along with (Kabuto). The Hercules beetle then spread its giant outer wings, while beating its thin inner wings to slowly lift off.

“Kya...!”

“Hold on tight.”

The Hercules beetle carrying the trio instantly climbed attitude. Although its accelerating speed was slower than Ubuki, its strong and powerful wings were making the flight less shaky for those who were sitting on it.

The white-coated figures surrounding the area immediately came charging at Yuu and the others. It seemed like they were not a part of the airborne squad, only their (Mushi) came attacking, not themselves together.

“Their number really did decrease quite a lot, it seems like that person called Ubuki is really trying her best.”

The gale started by the Hercules beetle immediately blew the approaching (Mushi) away. Compared to the giant Hercules beetle, the Central Headquarters' (Mushi) were so tiny, like a bunch of louses. Even the attacks of those (Mushi) who charged through the storming wind and tackled the Hercules beetle with their bodies didn't even have the slightest effect on it at all.

Below them, they could see the bridge connecting to Ouka City.

Yuu, who was sitting on top of the Hercules beetle, surveyed the surrounding streetscapes of Higano City.

But just in that instant ---

"Watch out...!"

Through Yuu's eyes, she caught a glimpse of the objects that were flying diagonally from behind them.

The Hercules beetle's body was shaken a bit immediately after that.

"Guahh...!"

(Kabuto) showed a painful expression.

Piercing through the storm created by the Hercules beetle, countless arrows rained down from the sky.

"Ughh...!"

"(Kabuto)!"

The second wave came right away at the Hercules beetle without stopping. The arrows that were flying at a blinding speed struck the giant Hercules beetle's giant body one after another.

"(Toramaru)...!"

Yuu mumbled lightly. He was one of the pursuers that attacked Yuu and the others yesterday.

"Damn it!"

"(Kaguya), don't fight back! We have to focus on defense!"

Akatsuki manipulated the golden-colored mayfly, yet (Kabuto) cut in and stopped him.

"Right now is not the time for that! If this goes on, we will only become their target!"

"You don't understand the Central Headquarters! If we were to fight back, they will use it as an excuse to attack the East Central Division!"

"Attack?! Why would they do such a thing?!"

"Focus on defense, (Kaguya)!"

“...What the hell are the people of the Central Headquarters thinking?!”

The mayfly curved its twin tails; the golden beams emitted from the end of its tails began to shoot down the flying arrows one by one.

However, (Toramaru)’s arrows were just way too fast; less than half of the arrows were shot down. The Hercules beetle’s body was continuously pierced deeply by the arrows, causing green fluid to spew out endlessly. (Kabuto) pressed hard onto his chest as he curved forward.

“Uh...!”

“(Kabuto)-san.....”

With a resolute attitude, (Kabuto) pushed away the hands of Yuu who intended on supporting him.

“Don’t worry about me... you should get ready yourself, we’re almost at Ouka City!”

Upon hearing that, Yuu raised her head.

The Hercules beetle just flew past the river, causing a broad streetscape to enter her view.

“This is...Ouka City.....”

The air suddenly became different.

The fragrance of the tidal water could be smelled mixing amidst the wind and the streets were filled with high-rising buildings that were still under construction; the sound of constructing could even be heard from where she was.

Yuu then turned around to look back at Higano City.

Her hands holding the CD involuntarily increased strength.

After going through the past couple of days since they left Akamaki City, she finally arrived here.

Since that moment she turned her head around on her way home from cram school, she had encountered many different people. She had laughed, feared, been angered many times while coming here, as well as encountered those who she held dear, and parting ways with them.

A new dream began to surface within Yuu’s heart.

“I...I will definitely come back here again...”

She whispered lightly to herself.

Shiika-san and Ubuki-san have given me many precious things... I will definitely, never forget them in my life.

And the present Ubuki-san gave me... A remnant of her hometown that's more precious than anything, how could she so easily sell something like that for me?...

I definitely have to repay her kindness.

I'll find the pendant that Ubuki-san sold. And this time, it will be me that gives the present to Ubuki-san. Infuse everything that I earned, my feelings, my emotions, every single one of them into it as I return it back to Ubuki-san.

"I...want to see Shiika-san and Ubuki-san."

No... I will definitely see them again!

After I deliver the CD to (Kakkou)-san, and finish everything! I'll take Ubuki's pendant with me, and go see them once again!

Yuu then gently placed the newly-birtherd tiny dream into the deepest part of her heart. Until the day she reunites with Shiika and Ubuki, before the day she returns the pendant back to Ubuki, she would hold this dream within her!

"Even after we entered Ouka City... it seems like they still don't have the intention of stopping their attack!"

While shooting down the incoming arrows, Akatsuki shouted loudly.

"Because those Central Headquarters people were often coerced... Of course they won't let us go this easily!"

"Coerced?"

"The head director and vice director are very terrifying... Ugh, we're going to land!"

After crossing the river, the Hercules beetle began its emergency landing towards the streets.

Akatsuki carried Yuu, and lowered his stance to get ready.

"(Kaguya), you go on ahead, try to get in contact with (Kakkou) and group up with him! Leave this to me!"

Facing (Kabuto) who turned around and said this, Akatsuki hesitated for a moment before nodding his head in response.

"Guahh!"

Out of nowhere, (Kabuto)'s body suddenly curved into a bow-shape from the pain. It seemed like (Toramaru)'s arrow had shot the Hercules beetle in the eye.

The Hercules beetle lost its balance in midair, and started crashing towards a building.

“Kyaaahh!!!”

“Damn it...!”

Carrying Yuu, Akatsuki jumped off in midair, attempting to make a landing.

On the other hand, (Kabuto) and his (Mushi) crashed into the building together.

“(Kabuto)!”

“Go...!”

(Kabuto), who’s head was bleeding from the crashing, shouted loudly to Akatsuki and Yuu, who had just barely landed safely.

Akin to ants devouring an elephant, the Central Headquarters’ (Mushi) attacked the giant Hercules beetle at once. The Hercules beetle used its wings to blow away the enemies.

Meanwhile, a few (Mushi) came approaching Yuu.

“...This way!”

“B-But, that person he...!”

“This is Ouka City, there will be reinforcements really soon! Let’s hurry and go!”

Being pulled by Akatsuki by the wrist, Yuu began to run along ---

The place where Yuu and the others had landed was an alley far away from the main streets. Judging from the scene that they saw from the sky, it should probably be right in between the coast park and the main streets.

“...!”

In front of Akatsuki and Yuu that were running towards Ouka City’s central area, a group of (Mushi) appeared and blocked their path. Behind the surrounding buildings, white-coated Mushitsuki appeared one after another as well.

“What?! Why are the Central Headquarters’ members here?!”

The (Mushi) came attacking the two of them unanimously.

Akatsuki immediately manipulated the mayfly to shoot out many golden lasers, which caused the Central Headquarters’ members to stop in fear.

However, when they realized that the lasers were not aimed at them, the white-coated figures immediately resume their attack at Akatsuki and Yuu again.

“W-Where is (Kakkou)-san?”

“I’m trying to contact him right now! He should probably be in the area!”

Akatsuki pressed his hand against the goggles, trying desperately to contact him. Yuu, who was running along him, gazed carefully at Akatsuki’s movement.

(Kakkou)-san is around here---

Yuu’s heart was beating violently.

After seeing him, what should I say?

How do I explain so that he would accept the CD? Can I really deliver (Centi)’s will to him?

New white-coated figures appeared in front of them.

The two of them hurriedly changed their direction, and moved along a different route.

Uneasiness began to arise within Yuu.

Even if I were to see (Kakkou)-san, will he really accept the CD?

He might possibly ignore Yuu’s existence and leave, since to him, he didn’t have the obligation to accept the CD.

For the sake of not letting that happen, what should I say?

--- (Centi) was fighting for (Ladybird)’s sake!

--- Ubuki-san was desperately protecting me!

--- Shiika-san had always believed in me!

--- I-I’ve finally come here after going through so much---

The more that she thought, the more unsuitable lines that showed up. There were too many ways of putting feelings into words, but she just couldn’t find the right one.

Just then, both Yuu’s and Akatsuki’s vision became broad.

The two of them escaped from the labyrinth-like residential area, and arrived at a vast open space.

This place seemed to be a scheduled construction site of a high-rising building; there were two tall steel frame towers lining right next to each other.

“Huh? The communication got disconnected...?---“

Yuu heard Akatsuki’s troubled voice.

“There’s someone over there...”

Yuu came to a stop.

In the vast open space between the two giant towers, there was a figure.

So pretty ---

Yuu could not help but be fascinated from looking at the figure.

Which school's uniform is that?...

The teenage girl was wearing a navy blue uniform blazer.

"Ri---"

Akatsuki could not help but involuntary blurt that line out. The figure of him gazing dumbfounded, as he stood rooted to the ground as if he had just seen a ghost.

"Rina.....?"

"...Eh---?"

A light surprised sound was then squeezed from Yuu's throat.

Facing their gazes, the teenage girl looked to Yuu and showed a glamorous smile:

"---Hey, could you tell me your dream?"

Unknowingly, the sun that had already tilted towards the western sky, rendered the vast open space into a deep orange.

Shiika Part 8

“Haa...Haa...”

In the alley of the shopping district near Ouka City’s train station, Shiika was running desperately.

There was no one passing through the narrow alleys; a completely deserted area.

Due to the fact that she had been running ever since she left Higano City, her stamina was now already running low; her running speed was almost the same as her walking speed.

But even so, Shiika continued to run.

“...Ah!”

Not noticing the rusty metal pipe on the ground, Shiika stumbled and fell.

However, even after falling onto the hard ground, her body didn’t feel any pain. Perhaps it was because of her excessive lack of oxygen? She couldn’t even feel her limbs anymore.

Shiika hurriedly groped around inside her pocket with her hand before she could even get up.

She then heaved a sigh of relief.

It’s okay. I managed to protect it right when I fell, so I didn’t crush it...

Shiika then raised her head, before suddenly widening her eyes.

“...!”

One after another, figures began to appear from behind the buildings.

Shiika immediately climbed up from the ground, intent on turning around and fleeing.

However, her back was also blocked by the white-coated figures.

“Located (Fuyuhotaru), please immediately send reinforcement.”

The white-coated figure, standing in the front row, pressed his hand against the goggles and said this line.

--- No.

Fear instantly eroded Shiika’s heart.

It was the same fear that she had experienced numerous times already; however, this fear wasn't the same fear of her afraid to get hurt.

"Before the East Central Division comes here, seize her!"

Dozens of (Mushi) began to appear one after another next to the white-coated figures, before leaping at her from both sides simultaneously.

--- *Stop.*

Behind the white-coated figures, a tall white-colored building could be seen in the distance.

That was Ouka East High School.

The (Mushi) that were leaping at her and the nostalgic school building, began to overlap in her view.

--- *Don't get in my way!*

Shiika could feel a voice echoed within her heart.

In that instant, a small snowflake descended from the sky ---

"[Shatter...]"

A firefly glowing in a pure white aura slowly rose into the air in front of Shiika.

"...!"

The Central Headquarters' members were stunned as they stood rooted to the ground with dumbfounded expressions.

The snowflake melted into the ground.

"Uahhhh!!!"

After bulging, the paved road exploded into pieces, sending numerous white-coated figures flying with the debris.

A deep fissure was then carved into the ground, slowly eroding the nearby buildings before bringing them down completely as well.

Shiika gazed dazedly at the scene of destruction unfolding before her.

I have to go ---

Her heart was overtaken by a pure motivation.

For Ubuki's sake, for Yuu's sake, and... for my own dream.

I can't stop here...

“What are you guys doing?! Use this chance and seize (Fuyuhotaru)---!”

Before the white-coated figure could finish saying his command, he was interrupted by another voice.

“[Don't get in...my way...]”

The firefly suddenly emitted a much more dazzling glow.

At the reddish sky that drawing closer to evening, white dots appeared.

Those were the silhouettes of pure white snow.

And not just one snowflake, but countless white snowflakes were slowly raining down from the sky.

The Central Headquarters' members were standing where they were, gazing at the sky. Some of them already slumped onto the ground as if they had foreseen their incoming end.

Shiika glared at the white-coated figures.

“[Disappear... before me...]”

--- Why do you guys always have to hinder me...?

Resentment began to spread within Shiika.

Right now, she needed to get to Ouka East High school as soon as possible. During the time she wasted from being stopped here, Ubuki was fighting against a large number of enemies all by herself, and Yuu was also desperately trying her best.

--- No matter what I endure... no matter how much I endure, God never gives me anything...

The aura coming from the pure white firefly gradually grew stronger.

The snow that was filling the sky began to descend onto the ground.

--- No matter how hard I tried... no matter where I go... I can't find a place where I belong...

Shiika pursed her lips.

All I ever wanted was a place of belonging...!

“[Just destroy everything...!]”

“Just destroy everything ...!”

Shiika's voice, and the (Mushi)'s voice overlapped as one.

In that instant, Shiika's surroundings darkened.

“...!”

Shiika came back to her senses, and turned around.

Subconsciously, the sunset in the horizon on the edge of the train station were gradually sinking.

The dark shadows of the buildings nearby were cast onto Shiika and the surrounding white-coated figures.

The reddish sunset that was casted over the sky then entered Shiika’s view.

Feeling almost taken over by her negative emotions, ripples could be felt spreading within her heart.

Shiika bit tightly onto her lips.

“[Just destroy... and make them all disappear....!]”

Large pieces of snow were about to come in contact with the (Mushi) herd.

However, just at that instant ---

Shiika made a big jump next to a pile of metal pipes, and picked one up.

“Stop it---!”

Shiika held onto the metal pipe, and ran towards the firefly unsteadily.

Using the momentum resulted from running, she crashed into the firefly.

The tip of the metal pipe pierced deeply into the body of the pure white firefly.

“...!”

A burning impact could be felt piercing through Shiika’s chest.

The firefly spurted out a large amount of fluid as it gave off a painful scream.

“What?! She actually hurt her own (Mushi)---“

The aching consciousness was starting to cause the white-coated people’s figures to become blurred in her view.

Shiika then collapsed onto the firefly as pain and emptiness carved a deep scar within.

“Ah...”

Shiika’s eyes lost their lusters for an instant.

However ---

“Someday...I’ll definitely able to find... a place where I belong...”

The snow that was dancing down, melted into the space before disappearing.

Shiika clenched her teeth.

Although her dream was being engulfed by pain, emptiness, fear, and might disappear any time, there was something even stronger holding onto it.

“I’m going to use my legs... No matter how many times... I will not give up...”

Her (Mushi)’s pupils were gazing at Shiika from a close distance.

--- *Daisuke-kun*...

She then recalled the teenage boy who caused her to remember her dream.

“...There must be a place... where I belong...”

The place of belonging that allows Shiika to stay definitely exists.

Different from the Shiika four years ago.

Different from the Shiika two months ago.

The Shiika now, had people who believed in her, and would wait for her.

The fluid-soaked metal pipe fell onto the floor from the firefly’s body.

In front of Shiika, the injured pure white firefly gradually shrank down before flying into Shiika’s hair to hide itself.

“.....”

Shiika then shifted her gaze to white-coated figures that were surrounding her.

This sent a chill running down the Central Headquarters’ members’ spines immediately.

“Please don’t... come after me anymore.”

After saying that, Shiika left the scene.

The combatants that had completely lost their will to fight were seeing her off dazedly.

And then, Shiika dashed.

Advancing towards the white-colored school building that could be seen in the far distance.

The soul-ripping pain and emptiness had caused her to trip countless time already. But even so, her gaze remained fixed on the school building.

--- Stumbling due to the sudden change in road height, Shiika fell onto the floor.

She possibly passed out for that instant right?

Shiika wobbly raised her head to gaze at the school building that was shrouded in the sunset's glare.

"....."

On the pillar that she was leaning against, the words "Ouka East High School" were written.

Lifting her barely awake head, Shiika stood up.

Perhaps today might be a holiday; the interior of the school building was very quiet.

Walking past the front gate, Shiika followed the wall and walked to the 1st floor's entrance. Although she had come here only once to look for Rina, she still clearly remembered the locations of various rooms in the school.

In the eyes of Shiika who raised her head, the building where the art classroom used to be could be seen.

It had been several months already since that incident; it seemed like the building was still undergoing maintenance, the ground was covered in iron wires. But she could still tell that the school was gradually returning to its original state. Upon seeing this, Shiika wanted to show a smile, but her body was too weak to even smile a bit.

Passing through the opened entrance, she stepped into the school building. Her consciousness was hazy enough that she even forgot to take off her shoes, but she probably didn't even have the energy for that anyway.

Faster, even if it's just one step faster, I have to obtain the painting...

"....."

In her blurred view, a soft light appeared.

(Hotaru) --- It was the nickname that she gave to her (Mushi) a few years ago.

As if it was guiding Shiika, the injured pure white firefly flew deeper into the school building.

Shiika held onto the handrail of the stairway, and climbed up one stair after another.

The art classroom was located at this building's top floor.

After a while, she finally finished climbing.

In front of her was a new hallway that had just finished being constructed. The nostalgic sign of “Art Classroom” could be seen at the end of the hallway. The white firefly was also floating in the air waiting for Shiika.

Shiika leaned her hand against the windows, gradually moving forwards to the art classroom.

--- E-Excuse me...

--- Shiika...? Didn't you say you were going to see your boyfriend in the afternoon?

In her mind appeared the smile of Rina.

“Haa...Haa...”

Shiika slowly trudged forwards in the hallway.

--- I'm attending Ouka East High School. You know which one?

She originally thought that even though it might be a holiday, there's might be a chance that she'd chance upon Daisuke. But judging from the fact that there weren't any students in the school, it seemed like he possibly wouldn't be here right?

Recalling the memories of several months ago, the things that happened in the past few days also surfaced along.

--- UUuuuwaaahhh...! Shiika-san you ecchi!

Although Yuu would always have an expression as if she would cry right away, she never gives up, always trying her best to run forward. She would definitely become a great adult in the future.

--- Congratulations!

The last smile that Ubuki gave was the happiest smile that Shiika had ever seen since their encounter. Thinking back at it now, the encounter with her was probably the beginning of everything. Although she had said that she wanted revenge for losing her hometown, was she still thinking about it now? If possible, Shiika hoped she could pursue her own happiness; she really prayed so from the bottom of her heart.

On the door of the art classroom hung a sign that read “Interior undergoing renovation. Students are prohibited from entering”.

Shiika put her hand on the handle, and pushed open the doors.

The orange sunset rendered everything in her sight with its hue.

In the center of the art classroom shrouded in twilight, there was an easel standing there, while other canvases were covered with white sheets.

Shiika walked into the classroom, and took the white sheet off.

“I’m back, Rina.....”

Huge tears were shedding down her cheeks.

A teenage boy’s familiar figure was drawn on the canvas.

Kusuriya Daisuke.

The well-drawn portrait of the teenage boy was already severely damaged, possibly resulting from the battle when Shiika was here last time. The corner of the canvas was cut off, and the whole portrait was covered in tiny scratches all over.

Shiika then embraced the canvas tightly in her arms.

“I’m back, Daisuke-kun.....”

As Shiika shed more tears, white-colored figures appeared in front of her.

“Hishu level one ranked (Fuyuhotaru), we’re going to arrest you.”

It seemed like they were the Central Headquarters’ members that had come as reinforcements, the white-coated figures surrounded Shiika immediately.

Shiika slowly raised her head, before noticing another canvas that was hanging on the wall.

As if the whole sunset was put into the canvas, the breath-taking painting stood out very much. On the heading that reads “The Winner of The Painting Competition Hosted by Ouka City’s Mayor”, Rina’s name was craved.

Shiika subconsciously reached her hand towards that painting.

I’ve... made a promise with Yuu-chan, to give Rina’s beloved sunset painting to her as present ---

“Don’t move!”

A (Mushi)’s leg swung at Shiika.

Unsure of where she was hit, Shiika was send flying into a wall along with Daisuke’s portrait in her arms.

She then collapsed onto the ground weakly, completely unable to move.

A tiny package had fallen out of her pocket onto the floor at the same time.

It was the chocolate that she received from the teenage girl she encountered back at Higano City.



“S-Seize her!”

Hearing the shouted orders coming from around her, Shiika’s consciousness was taken by the darkness.

Ubuki Part 6

Ubuki's vision was dyed crimson red by her blood.

Her head was injured from the attack; the goggles that she was wearing had de-fused from her after being smacked away, and turned into a piece of metal as it fell to the ground.

However, Ubuki still maintained a smile.

She emergency braked before accelerating instantaneously, narrowly dodging the mandible of a (Mushi) coming from behind. However, she was immediately surrounded by a large number of enemies again.

She could only do a sharp turn to dodge the incoming wave, but her leg was grazed by a (Mushi)'s sharp claw during the process.

Enemies, enemies, enemies ---

Her entire field of vision was filled with Central Headquarters' (Mushi). In addition to the (Mushi) that had the ability to fly, Special type Mushitsuki, and the long-ranged attack squad had surrounded Ubuki completely.

The view of Higano City below her seemed very far away. If one were to look up from the ground below, the battle between (Mushi) would probably look like a bunch of birds fighting.

Ubuki climbed higher in attitude, intending to breaking through the surrounding formation.

But a sudden gale which came from behind caused Ubuki's wings to instantly become dull.

"Ah.....!"

Taking advantage of this, the airborne squad's (Mushi) immediately closed in and bit onto Ubuki's shoulder. Sharp fangs dug deep into her skin, causing brain piercing pain to ache against her.

The (Mushi) then swung its head, throwing Ubuki back into the air. Other (Mushi) immediately charged towards at the falling Ubuki at once.

"...Mnn!!"

Ubuki squeezed out energy to rapidly beat her wings, and narrowly grazed by their attacks in a nick of time.

"Ahhhhhh!!!"

Ubuki continued to increase her speed, and charged through their encircling net. The airborne squad immediately chased after her.

How long has it been since she parted with Shiika and Yuu? It felt like only a few minutes had passed, but it also felt like few hours had passed as well.

The freezing wind blew against her eyes that had lost the protection of the goggles. Blood began to flow into her eyes; one of her eyes was almost close to blind. The right shoulder that was bitten by (Mushi) was losing strength; the bone was probably broken within. And she couldn't even feel her injured left leg anymore. The streaming blood had almost dyed the entirety of her clothing in red.

Even so, the smile on Ubuki's face did not disappear.

"Not enough! Your guys' attacks... are completely useless.....!"

Ubuki continued to provoke while gliding. The airborne squad attacked at once, but Ubuki still managed to dodge them one by one with her severely injured body.

"None of you... can take anything from... me anymore---Uagh!"

The smiling Ubuki was knocked away flying.

It seemed like the new reinforcements had arrived, the (Mushi) closing in on the side used its body to tackle Ubuki.

".....!"

Ubuki's body lost its balance in midair, which gave the chance for two other (Mushi) to tackle her from both sides. The disgusting sound of bone shattering could be heard coming from somewhere near her chest; the eye-widened Ubuki then coughed out a mouthful of blood.

"Ah....."

The blood scattered before Ubuki as her consciousness became hazy; as she fell to the ground.

Her limbs refused to make any response at all, not even one finger would respond to her. Through her blurred vision, she could see the enemy army that was flying after her falling self.

She was already broken beyond her limits, due to the Physical fatigue combined with her severe wounds— in addition to over using her (Mushi)'s ability. The past memories began to flash through the mind of Ubuki, who was falling straight down.

--- I have...to go back to the island...

The sound of the Aoharima Island's tidal waves was echoing against Ubuki's ears.

As well as the soft and comfortable sea breeze. Gazing from Ubuki's VIP seat, one would be able to overlook the whole island's scenery from there. The trees that were swaying from the breeze, the

fishing boats that were floating by the coast, the joyful islanders, and the dismal clinic, every single one of them.

Unknowingly, a young man appeared standing next to Ubuki.

--- *(Sensei).....*

Ubuki smiled at the young man.

The young man also replied with a smile, but that smile seemed to be filled with fatigue, causing it to appear very lonesome.

Suddenly, the figure of the young man was enveloped by darkness.

Aside from the young man, everything on the island was engulfed by the dark flame.

Ubuki immediately reached her arms out.

But no matter how hard she called, she couldn't hear any sound, nothing at all.

In the end, the whole space was eroded by darkness. The only things she could see were her hands. Even though she tried to grab onto something, latch onto something, she couldn't see anything.

--- *Only me... someone like me survived... I'm sorry, everyone.....*

The hands that were unable to take back anything were clenched tightly.

--- *But, (Sensei).....*

Just before her consciousness was enveloped by the darkness, the corner of Ubuki's lip moved slightly upwards.

There was something.

At the end of the darkness, the horizon of the far distant, she could see something tiny glowing.

--- *I...found a new dream.....*

It was a small light.

The light was very weak as if it would burn out any second.

An image then suddenly flashed through her mind.

The image of two teenage girls reaching their hands towards her ---

Hearing the roaring sound of wind blowing by her ears, her fingertip trembled slightly.

In front of her opened palms, the (Mushi) army could be seen.

“...!”

Ubuki twisted her body as she spread her two pairs of wings, and beat them forcefully.

The approaching ground came to a halt in front Ubuki, who made an emergency stop.

And then, Ubuki landed onto the ground with her four limbs --- the landing point seemed to be a vast and open land, somewhere like a park.

Ubuki then raised her head.

She was probably showing horrible smile now right? Ubuki knew... the instant when those white-coated figures saw her escape the fate of her falling to her death in a nick of time, every single one of them were putting up an expression of disbelief.

“I’m not gonna die! Never ever ---!”

Ubuki used her two legs and two hands to leap, and glided.

“This is just the start of everything! Next, I’m going to get revenge against that woman! And then go back to island---“

Flying close to the ground, Ubuki suddenly saw a group of figures standing in the distance ahead.

There were a few people standing at the plaza.

Through her blood-stained eyes, Ubuki caught the glimpse of the figure standing at the very front.

--- In the hand of *that* woman showing a bright smile, was a gun.

After a gunshot echoed, Ubuki realized that she had been shot down.

4.09

Yuu The Last

“ --- Could you tell me your dream?”

As if she were trying to entice Yuu, the teenage girl reached her hands towards her.

“Rina? How’s this possible.....”

Akatsuki murmured dazedly on the side.

Just then, some people appeared from behind them; they were the Central Headquarters’ members who finally caught up.

“(Ladybird).....?!”

“How’s that possible?! Didn’t she already---?”

Their panicking voices could be heard coming from behind.

The teenage girl --- Tachibana Rina showed a smile as purplish scale powder-like glitter could be seen showering down from her uniform blazer.

It was a swallowtail butterfly. Yuu’s gaze was completely drawn by faint glowing butterfly.

“Lady...bird...?”

Yuu then walked closer towards Rina.

“Wait, Yuu!”

Akatsuki immediately grabbed Yuu’s wrist, his eye remaining fixed at the swallowtail resting on Rina’s shoulder.

“No...---“

A look of fear emerged onto the teenage boy’s face.

“That person is not Rina... Rina doesn’t smile like that. That person is --- Yuu!”

Yuu forcefully shook away Akatsuki’s hand.

“Don’t get in my way!”

“...Yuu?”

“I have to...deliver this to Ladybird...”

Akatsuki widened his eyes surprised as Rina deepened her smile.

"You can't, Yuu!"

Yuu glared at Akatsuki who was trying to stop her.

Akatsuki-san is also the enemy.

He is trying to take the CD away from me, even though it is something that's only meant for (Ladybird) and (Kakkou)-san---

Yuu made a quick step backward.

Rina continued to smile as purple scale powder began to exude from her body.

The white-coated figures that came in contact with the scale powder suddenly dimmed their expression.

"Uuhh...Yuu...!"

Akatsuki was also affected by the purple scale powder, which caused him to show a painful expression. He dropped to his knees, using his hand to support himself while clenching his teeth, enduring the pain.

Every single one of the white-coated figures was standing still, not moving in the slightest. Akin to sleepwalking, their soulless gazes remained fixed at the Yuu who was walking closer to Rina.

And then, Yuu dived into Rina's arms, causing more purple scale powder to shower down. Within Yuu who breathed in the scale powder, a sense of comfort enveloped.

"Yuu, you've always wanted to see me right?"

Rina smiled.

And Yuu replied with a smile as well.

We finally met.

After enduring countless fears and uneasiness for the past few days, she finally arrived here. The painful things and sorrowful things that happened during the trip, every single one of them was for the sake of meeting this person.

Embraced in Rina's arms, a sweet sense of euphoria enveloped Yuu.

--- Eh?

An alarm, which was sent from the calmest part of her mind, echoed.

The encounter with (Centi), Shiika, and Ubuki,

After encountering her precious people, and received many helps, she finally arrived here.

Akin to a dim ember that was barely glowing amidst the strong wind, Yuu's last remaining rationality whispered lightly to her ears.

--- For what did I come here for?

Yuu held tightly onto the CD as she murmured in her heart.

Rina turned Yuu's body facing Akatsuki and the others, before embracing Yuu from behind with her cold arms.

"Come on... Let me hear that delicious dream of yours that just birthed not so long ago....."

Dream ---

Yuu remembered.

That's right, Yuu had a dream.

Because of her encounter with Shiika and Ubuki, she finally had something that she wanted to do. No matter how long, or how hard it takes, she definitely would not give up realizing it --- This was the dream that Yuu had depicted.

"Don't answer her, Yuu! If you tell her, you would ---!"

Akatsuki, who was pressing against his head in pain was stabbed by a (Mushi)'s sharp claw from behind.

"Ughhh...!"

The Central Headquarters' members suddenly attacked Akatsuki; his shoulder was pierced by a (Mushi)'s sharp claw.

"What---?!"

Akatsuki dropped to the ground, before slowly raising his head to look at the white-coated figures walking past him. Dozens of combatants were standing in front of Rina and Yuu, preventing Akatsuki from getting any closer.

Rina then whispered lightly next to Yuu's ears:

"Now come on... Yuu... Let me hear your dream!"

Yuu slowly opened her mouth.

Have to say it... I have to tell her... my dream right now... It was for that reason that I've come here...

"Ughahhhh!!!"

Suddenly, Akatsuki roared.

Next to the kneeling teenage boy, the golden mayfly twitched and whipped its twin tails.

Countless beams were then projected across the vast open space shrouded in twilight. Passing through the white-coated figures and narrowly grazing passed Yuu's cheek, all of them were shot directly into Rina's body.

"Efemera, how could you do this to me...? Unbelievable."

Yuu raised her head to look at Rina.

The teenage girl's face had completely disintegrated; a large amount of shining purple scale powder was spurting out from within.

Akatsuki continued roaring:

"I will never forgive you for insulting Rina like this... (Oogui)!"

Purple scale powder then exploded.

Rina's figure disappeared without a trace --- instead of her, was a sunglasses wearing beauty embracing Yuu with her arms. Yuu noticed the woman's pupils that were hiding underneath the sunglasses were shining with a colorful glow.

"You've become quite strong, Ogata Akatsuki."

(Oogui)'s rosy lips slightly twitched.

At the same time, the white-coated figures initiated their attack on Akatsuki.

"Ugh.....!"

Yuu gazed dazedly at the battle unfolding before her.

"Now... Tell me, what is your dream?"

Whispering with a sweet voice, (Oogui) tried to provoke the inner desire hiding within Yuu.

Want to tell her... I want to scream my dream out loud without holding back... I ---

"Snap out of it, Yuu! Don't get turned into a Mushitsuki!"

Akatsuki shouted while suppressing the white-coated figures.

--- Don't get turned into a Mushitsuki.

Her other half was whispering next to her ears.

--- Why not?

Yuu tried to recall.

--- *Because, Shiika-san and Ubuki-san they.....*

Before she could recall any further, she was interrupted by (Oogui)'s sweet voice.

"Tell me, Yuu... Give me your delicious dream!"

Yuu's rationality was silenced.

--- ...

"My dream... is ..."

Just when she began to speak, a black shadow entered her view.

"That's right, Yuu is a good girl! Now... Let me hear ---"

The smiling (Oogui) urged her halfway, and paused.

However, Yuu shifted her gaze away from (Oogui), and looked at the distance behind Akatsuki.

"Who...are...you?"

Yuu muttered lightly.

"I"

Just that instant, in addition to (Oogui) and Akatsuki, all the white-coated figures stopped their movement.

Above the residential building where Yuu and Akatsuki came from, there was someone standing there. The glare of the sunset illuminated the pitch black figure that was overlooking the vast open space. The long coat that was dancing with the wind seemed just like a pair of black-colored wings, and due to the reflection of light, his erected hair gave an impression of horns.

--- The pitch black demon, was holding a giant revolver singled handed.

"East Central Division!"

The demon shouted.

In that instant, a large number of black-coated figures appeared behind the revolver-holding figure. And at the same time, countless (Mushi) appeared along onto the building.

"Go!"

The black-coated figures jumped down all at once. They ran passed the injured Akatsuki, and initiated their attack on the white-coated figures. Moans and cries could be heard coming endlessly from within the vast open space.

“.....(Kakkou)!”

Akatsuki glared at the black demon with an expression as if he would throw himself at him any time if it weren't for the fact that he was severely injured.

“Kak...kou...?”

Yuu subconsciously repeated with a mutter--- within Yuu who had lost her ability to think, a wave of ripples could be felt.

(Kakkou) looked down at Akatsuki.

No, it would possibly be more correct to put it as a look of contempt. Akatsuki replied with a look of hatred as he clenched his fists so tightly that his nails could be seen digging into his skin.

“I don't wish to be saved by you at all!”

Akatsuki then turned his head facing Yuu --- glaring at (Oogui).

At the same time, the golden mayfly outburst lasers at her direction, tracing light arcs across the sky.

“You can't!~”

(Oogui) whispered lightly:

“How could you get in the way of your mother having meals?”

(Oogui) widened her colorful pupils.

Shining scale powder immediately surrounded (Oogui) and Yuu. The instant right before the mayfly's lasers hit (Oogui), they were twisted as if a mirror reflected them. The beams that had their direction changed pierced through the steel frame towers standing next to Yuu and the others. The giant towers that had lost its foundation, gradually fell towards the direction of the residential building.

And then, the tower crashed into the ground, causing an earthquake to shake the whole vast open space.

The steel tower landed a few inches away from (Kakkou)'s feet, yet he didn't seem moved even the slightest by this nor did he take a glance at it.

“Woah....ahhh!!!”

Suddenly, the black-coated figures that raised their head to look at the sky were screaming in fear.

The sunset had disappeared, leaving a dark shadow to befall the vast open space. Akatsuki also looked up at the sky, and was so stunned that he couldn't mutter a word. Only (Kakkou) remained unmoved; his eyes were staring straight at (Oogui).

Ouka City's sky was covered by dark clouds.

No, after looking closer, it wasn't a black cloud.

"....."

Yuu dazedly raised her head, and saw the pair of eyes that was floating in the sky.

The purple swallowtail completely covered the sky; its gigantic body could no longer be described with the word "huge". Not only did it cover Ouka City's sky, its enormous body also covered up Higano City's and Akamaki's City's sky as well. And on the four wings that were glowing in a purple aura, human-like eyes appeared.

"!"

All of the coat-wearing figures were terrified from top to toe.

The giant eyes that appeared onto the swallowtail's wings were rolling before fixing straight at Yuu and others.

"Uaghhhh!"

"Ahh...Ahhhh!"

"Wahhh!"

Regardless of the coat color, all of the combatants in the scene fled after giving off terrified cries. There were even people who went berserk and attacked their nearby companions in confusion.

"Only those children without manners...get in the way of their parents having a meal!"

(Oogui)'s pupils were glowing brightly in a rainbow color, staring coldly at (Kakkou).

"Ugh...I-Is this an illusion...?"

At the scene, only (Kakkou) and Akatsuki didn't fall into a frenzied state. (Kakkou) bit his lips slightly, while Akatsuki was showing a painful expression. Yuu, who had lost her ability to reason, did not understand what was happening around her.

Yuu was only gazing straight at the revolver that was pointing at her.

Upon seeing this, Akatsuki shouted:

"Stop it, (Kakkou)...! Are you trying to kill her too?!"

The two pairs of eyes floating in the sky turned to look at (Kakkou) and Akatsuki.

“Uaghh...!”

Akatsuki showed an even more painful expression as the mayfly next to him was giving off the sound of its body being gradually crushed.

It was a scene that Yuu had seen before.

Although she did not get a clear glimpse of the white snowflakes back then, this was clearly the same ability as Shiika’s---

“(Mushi)...will...be shattered...!”

Just then, (Oogui) closed up her lips next to Yuu’s ears where Yuu could almost feel her breathing, and whispered:

“Look, so many people came here to listen to you speak of your dream...”

The rainbow-colored pupils and four giant eyes were staring straight at Yuu.

“Yuu... Tell me what is your dream!”

Yuu, however, shifted her gaze at (Kakkou).

I came here for the sake of meeting him...

--- Congratulations!

--- Congratulations!

Ubuki and Shiika’s smiles suddenly flashed through.

Why did the two of them say “Congratulations” to her?

She tried to recall, as her hands that was holding CD increased strength unknowingly.

Yuu remembered that she had something that she needed to do no matter what. On the way back home from cram school, because of her turning her head around for an instant, this three-day trip began. At first, she was filled with fear and confusion.

But now it was different.

After the encounter with Shiika and Ubuki, Yuu felt herself changed.

The present that she received from Ubuki, a present that was bought by an incredibly stupid method, had made her so happy from the bottom of her heart. She couldn’t even stop herself from crying from the overwhelming joy.

“My dream... is...”

Yuu then noticed ---

(Kakkou) didn't fix his gaze at (Oogui). The one that his eyes were looking at was none other than herself.

He didn't speak a word, just merely looked straight at Yuu with his eyes hiding underneath the goggles. She understood the meaning behind his expression, there was no way she could be mistaken.

It was the same expression that Ubuki and Shiika had before they departed --- An expression of full trust.

Yuu then turned her head around to look (Oogui) in the eyes:

“--- I'm not gonna tell you!”

The sunglasses-wearing woman was speechless.

Before I realize my dream, I would never tell anyone about it. That's right, it's something that I've decided on my own!

After giving the CD to (Kakkou), and finding Ubuki's pendant. Only after that day arrives would she bring herself to see those two once again and confess to them. With her best smile, tell them about the dream that she found because of them.

That was Yuu's dream --- a never-changing dream.

A strong gale suddenly stormed across the vast open space.

The wind blew upwards, pushing back the enormous swallowtail that was covering the sky. Orange rays then pierced through the disappearing eyes.

Purple scale powder began to disperse and the sky was once again dominated by the setting sun.

“W-What just happened?”

Akatsuki's question echoed in the vast open space. The originally moaning combatants were now gazing dazedly at the swallowtail slowly disappearing from the sky.

A cold breeze blew past Yuu's neck.

(Oogui) caressed Yuu's chin, and narrowed her iridescent eyes.

“We'll meet again, Yuu.”

(Oogui) showed a distorted smile as she raised her head to look at (Kakkou):

“Until the day when your dream matures and become even more delicious...okay?”

The woman who was showing a treacherous smile was then surrounded by purple scale powder.

After an explosion, the scale powder dispersed into the air, the presence of the woman standing behind Yuu had also disappeared.

“She vanished...?”

Akatsuki muttered dazedly.

After (Oogui)’s presence fully vanished, the haze that was clouding Yuu’s mind gradually dissipated.

Everyone at the scene was standing where they were from exhaustion. (Kakkou) jumped down from the building, after putting away the revolver behind his back, he walked towards Yuu’s direction.

“Kak...(Kakkou)... That kid is...!”

Akatsuki tried to stop (Kakkou), but his severe wounds were preventing him from doing so.

Yuu’s heart was beating violently.

Gazing at the teenage boy that was slowly walking towards her, many different kinds of emotions arose from within.

Her legs moved naturally towards (Kakkou).

What should I say?

What do I have to say so that he knows?

The thoughts and feelings that she had in the past few days --- she must tell him all that. Even though she was nothing but an ordinary junior high school that could be seen anywhere, she endured all those, and arrived here.

Both Yuu and (Kakkou) stopped walking, and gazed at each other from a close distance.

--- *Sorry...Shiika-san, Ubuki-san:*

Yuu apologized to those two within her heart.

“This... For the sake of delivering this to (Kakkou)-san...we...”

Yuu held out the CD in front of her with both hands.

She couldn’t bring herself to look straight at his face.

Even her hands holding the CD were trembling slightly.

--- *Even after coming this far... I just...can’t endure it anymore...*

The shedding tears caused Yuu's voice to slightly tremble as well.

Just then, the figure of Ubuki who was still fighting flashed through her mind.

"Ubuki-san... Please go save her...please..."

Just merely uttering those words was already Yuu's limit.

Yuu sobbed uncontrollably; she didn't even realize the fact that her hands had become lighter.

"Thank you."

Yuu raised her head.

Unknowingly, the CD had already passed from her hands to the teenage boy's hands. Different from the voice that she heard the first time from him before, it was a very gentle and kind voice. The teenage boy's warm hands wiped away the tears that remained on Yuu's cheek.

The eyes that were gazing straight at her were very gentle as well, but it only lasted for an instant before they returned back to the sharp look he had on him from before.

"Just leave the rest to me!"

After speaking that line with a strong and powerful tone, the teenage boy turned around and left.

".....!"

She had reached her limit.

The running tears caused vision to become blurred, she couldn't even catch a clear glance of (Kakkou)'s slowly distancing figure.

Followed immediately after (Kakkou)'s hasted departure, the unconscious white-coated figures were taken away by the black-coated figures; the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau members all left the site afterward.

"I made it... Shiika-san... Ubuki-san....."



Yuu was now in a condition near passing out at any second, but she can't fall just yet.

In Akamaki City, she was entrusted with a CD from a teenage boy called (Centi).

And then, she encountered Shiika and Ubuki.

Being helped by them, and trusted by them, she finally arrived here.

Using her bare hands, Yuu finally delivered the CD that contained unspeakable emotions in it to (Kakkou) all by herself.

And now --- there was only one more important task remaining.

"I made it!... Shiika-san, Ubuki-san! I successfully delivered the CD to (Kakkou)-san!"

--- Besides, how are we gonna tell each other if we succeed or not...?

--- Mmm --- how about shout it out? Perhaps the other two might be able to hear it!

Shout it out loud.

Hoping that Shiika could hear it, hoping that Ubuki could hear it ---

On the vast open space where no one remained, Yuu used her remaining strength, and shouted as loud as she could.

"I delivered the CD to (Kakkou)-san!!! T-That's why, you two ---"

Her voice was gradually shrinking.

Yuu slumped onto the ground as her hands were trying to cover up the overflowing tears.

"That's why ---! You two, please don't die!"

Yuu's words quietly echoed throughout the vast open space before disappearing.

Shiika The Last

She could faintly hear something.

The sound of someone's shouting.

The painful moans, angry roars, and the sharp sound of things shattered onto the floor.

Was that the dying screech of a (Mushi)? Not just one, but a dozen of this sound echoed.

"Are you guys...(Mushibane)'s ---?!"

Someone's voice rang but immediately disappeared the next instant.

Silence returned once again to the surroundings.

Shiika weakly opened her eyes.

It seemed like she had passed out after being sent flying into the art classroom's wall. Due to overwhelming fatigue which resulted from all the running, she thought her heart had almost stopped beating. But it most likely could happen really soon right? Hearing the sound of her extremely weak heartbeat, she could not help but have an illusion that it would stop any second.

In front of her eyes was the floor of the art classroom.

The figures of the white-coated people lying motionless on the floor entered her view.

Although she tried to raise her head, she just couldn't do it. This time, she really pushed herself beyond her limit. Not only could she not feel anything from her limbs, her field of vision was also blurred.

"Get up, (Fuyuhotaru)."

Shiika heard a deep voice. Only after a few minutes had passed did she realize that those words were spoken directly at her.

"You brought this upon yourself. Whether it is the pain that your body is feeling, or the wounds in your heart aching. If only you had used your (Mushi)'s ability to get rid of the enemies, your pain would have lessened. Yet, you chose the path that hurt yourself rather than hurting others."

Shiika tried to apply some strength to her neck, yet she just couldn't raise her head no matter what.

"Do you want to look this way? Let me help you."

Suddenly, another voice rang.

A hand then appeared into her view, touched her chin and helped her changed the direction her head was facing. Through her eyes that would close any second, she caught a glimpse of two people.

One of them was a middle-aged man that had a few gray hairs on him. He had a very vigorous look; the suit outfitted on him signaled the possibility of him being an employee of a large corporation, he must be someone with a really high status right? But for some reason, when Shiika raised her head to look at him, he immediately looked away to avert her gaze.

The other one was a teenage boy. His hair was dyed in a tea-brown color, and he seemed to be around 15 years old. The teenage boy quietly gazed at the Shiika who was lying on the floor.

"Get up, (Fuyuhotaru)."

The middle-aged man continued, while still looking away from Shiika.

"Although I do not know what sort of feelings will you harbor as you move into the future from here on out. There is something I'm certain of. Ahead of you, will be realities that there're even harsher than what you've gone through already. Don't be so sure that there will definitely be salvation up ahead— Perhaps in the end, there may only be despair waiting for you. If you do not wish to step foot onto this road of no return, then lay still, we will kill your (Mushi) right now and relieve you of your suffering."

"....."

Shiika shifted her view, and suddenly noticed that even now, she was still hugging Daisuke's portrait that Rina drew, tightly in her arms.

"...Ubu...ki....."

Shiika whispered faintly.

The middle-aged man took a glance at Shiika, before immediately turning away again.

"That's right; we've come here to meet you upon her request. Ever since she signed a secret treaty with us, (Mushibane), during one of her missions long ago; she had been waiting for the chance for revenge. She secretly releases (Mushibane)'s members from SEPB's capture, while we will assist her in her revenge... She had the same goal as us. The original plan was to send you back to the Central Headquarters after you got what you wanted here --- What we hoped was the mutual destruction of both you and the Central Headquarters."

"....."

"However, in our last contact, she suddenly changed the content of the request and told us to deliver this message to you."

The man's gaze never fell upon Shiika as he spoke the contents of the "Message" with a flat tone.

"...!"

Shiika pursed her lips as tears began to shed down from the corner of her eyes.

Thank you.

Thank you, Ubuki.

Thank you for trusting me, and granting my wish.

A throbbing feeling could be felt surfacing from within; this bittersweet feeling gave Shiika a little bit of strength.

“If you wish to rest in place, then you better lay still. You should’ve been through this kind of situation numerous times already, in future and beyond, there’s no guarantee that this will not happen again.”

What the man said was true.

While Shiika was still in elementary school, she was turned into a Mushitsuki. After that, she was immediately hunted down by the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau, and became a Fallen after encountering (Kakkou).

Until a few months ago, when she met Daisuke.

But in this street, in this school, she collapsed once again. She was then recaptured by the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau, and spent the next couple of months living in solitude, away from the outside world.

And now, it was the same.

Shiika was already exhausted.

In the path beyond, just how many times this cycle would repeat? Getting hurt after she recalled her dream, falling down after becoming exhausted...

This kind of cycle might continue on forever.

But, there weren’t always those things happening either.

A pure wish, caused Shiika to stand up every times she wanted to give up.

“.....”

Just then, the pure white firefly flew in front of Shiika.

Shiika gazed at her (Mushi) as the faces of people whom she had met till now flashed through in her mind.

She encountered Rina.

She encountered (Kakkou).

She encountered Yuu.

She encountered Ubuki.

And then ---

--- I hope that you can wait for me next year...

She then recalled the most important person that she ever encountered.

Along the way, she met many people; those were definitely not just coincidence.

Even though every ounce of energy that she put into her body would cause various body parts to scream in pain, Shiika didn't want to give up.

Even if her energy was already used up before coming here, even if she was now completely exhausted, even if she couldn't move anymore---

--- The several encounters that she treasured which happened in the past.

The encounters and promises made between them, always pushed Shiika back on her feet. Those were the strengths that always gave the weak Shiika the will to stand up every time she fell, every time she wanted to give up.

Even if the cycle continued, it was okay.

Because the encounter would also continue.

And someday, there would definitely be a "Reunion".

Shiika continued to encounter many people.

That's why it was possible for her to stand up again and again.

Their encounters, made Shiika believe that her dream --- a place where she belongs definitely existed out there somewhere.

"I have someone... that I want to meet again..."

Reluctantly standing up with her feet, Shiika gazed at the middle-aged man.

In the portrait that she was hugging tightly in her arms, was someone that she wished to see the most.

"That person made me believe in myself... and would always wait for me..."

There weren't tears in her eyes anymore.

"That's why I have to go... please take me with you."

The man who never looked eye to eye with anyone nodded his head in response:

“My name is Munakata Kaiji... I’m (Mushibane)’s sponsor.”

The teenage boy who had been silent until now also opened his mouth:

“I’m (Aijisupa). From now on, no matter what happens, I’ll be by your side watching over you.”

Shiika pursed her lips before slowly turned to face the window rendered by the sunset, and squeezed out a slightly trembling voice:

“Ubuki, Yuu-chan... I’m off...”

--- Besides, how are we gonna tell each other if we succeed or not...?

--- Mmm --- how about shout it out? Perhaps the other two might be able to hear it!

Since she didn’t have any energy to scream out loud anymore, she screamed as loud as she could in her heart instead.

Yuu-chan, Ubuki! I won’t lose! Someday, I’ll definitely realize my dream...!

Shiika finally understood.

Even though there may be endless waves of enemies up ahead obstructing Shiika in the future, the worst enemy of all was actually her own weak heart hiding within her.

Just destroy everything --- no matter what, she had to overcome *that* self that would think as such when she faced setbacks.

The arms that were holding the portrait gradually began to lose strength.

“...I’m off... so that one day... I’ll be able to... --- you two again...”

The instant before she collapsed, her body was supported by the teenage boy called (Aijisupa).

“After you awaken, please give us your order, as the new leader of (Mushibane) --- (Sunoufurai)” [T/L: literal translation would be “Snow fly” like in firefly but replace it with snow. xD]

Hearing the teenage boy’s mechanical-like tone, Shiika gave in to the darkness.

4.11

Ubuki The Last

"Ugh...!"

Before Ubuki could have a chance to decelerate, she was shot down onto the ground.

Her whole body crashed before falling into a furious roll on the dirt, and didn't stop until she rolled quite a distance.

"Ahh...!"

Her body was aching in pain, which caused her to give off painful moans.

She could feel the uncomfortable sensation of gravel in her mouth, as well as the blood that tasted like rusty iron.

"Uh...Uuu...!"

However, Ubuki immediately raised her head up.

Dragging her fractured right arm, and the unresponsive feet, she crawled forward with her only arm that was left.

The wings that were shot by the bullet twitched restlessly— it wasn't long before the raven dragonfly de-fused itself from Ubuki's body. On the ground which Ubuki crawled over, a trail of blood could be seen.

"Uh...Ahhhhhh!!!"

Ubuki roared, as she continued to crawl forward.

"Miguruma... Yaeko...!"

The Special Environmental Preservation Bureau's vice director of the Central Headquarters --- Miguruma Yaeko was looking down at Ubuki with a smile.

The white-coated figures on the side surrounded Ubuki completely. Standing next to Yaeko, was her attendant Commissioner Inose.

Through the past three years, Ubuki had always been enduring.

Suppressing the dying thought of revenge that would tear her chest apart any second within her, while devoting herself to the Central Headquarters.

But the Ubuki now just couldn't suppress her emotions any longer. She raised her face dirtied by soil and blood to glare at the woman that she hated to the bone.

The woman who deprived Ubuki of her hometown.

The woman who deprived Ubuki of her first love.

Even if Ubuki were to strangle this woman to death with her bare hands, it wouldn't be able to calm the fury burning within her. During the past three years, she had been thinking about how to torture this woman day and night. The reason why she was working under her was also for the sake of vengeance one day.

Everything was for the sake of this day.

Everything was for the sake of revenge.

Anger, resentment, loneliness, pain, emptiness... She had been enduring those intense emotions all along.

"Give me back! My Island... My Onii, Onee... and (Sensei)...!"

Yaeko put away the handgun into her inner pocket, and squatted down before Ubuki.

"My beloved child... The prank this time, isn't it a bit too much?"

Yaeko showed a smile, and said with a tone akin to a parent scolding their child for tipping over juice.

"...I'm going to kill you!"

Ubuki suddenly grabbed onto the tip of Yaeko's hair.

However ---

"Know your place."

Yaeko's smile deepened; as if it were piercing through Ubuki's mind, her clear voice and calm gaze instantly chained Ubuki.

Just like what happened three years ago, her binding smile froze Ubuki stiff, causing her to be unable to move in the slightest. Aside from Ubuki, the surrounding people all stiffened their expression while looking at them.

"Please shoot her, commissioner Inose."

"...Excuse me?"

"Please shoot this child's arms and legs, because for her, they are no longer needed."

Inose's fat body was trembling slightly.

"B-But... doing that to a member is ---"

"Commissioner Inose?"

Yaeko turned around to stare at Inose. The fat man's face was sweating like crazy as if he had a fever.

Inose then slowly drew a handgun from his coat as a Central Headquarters' member took Ubuki's coat off her.

"What a pitiful child... How can she not understand my love."

With a look of sorrow, Yaeko gently caressed Ubuki's head.

Just then, a gunshot rang.

Ubuki widened her eyes, her right leg felt an impact as if a burning iron bar had pierced through.

"Ahhh...!"

Another gunshot rang as Ubuki's right leg bounced into the air from the ground.

".....!"

"From now on, I'll love you even more, I mean it!"

Another shot rang, the right arm that had been supporting her body suddenly lost strength, and caused Ubuki to slam her head onto ground.

"That's why, you will love me back right? Tell me the whereabouts of the CD and (Fuyuhotaru), (Karasu)."

The fourth gunshot rang, Ubuki couldn't tell which part of her body was hit. According to the order, it should be her left arm, right?

Ubuki had already lost half of her consciousness.

"I-Is she dead...?"

She faintly could hear the panicked voice of Inose.

After feeling the impact of someone's kick, Ubuki's body turned and faced towards the sky.

Through her slightly opened eyes, she could see Yaeko's amused expression.

"Are you kidding me, commissioner Inose? I'm in love with her this much..... How can this child die from just this?"

Inose was so scared that his face began to turn pale white. Even the white-coated figures surrounding them gasped as they inched back slightly.

--- I should've known...

Ubuki's field of vision flickered back and forth between white and black.

Even as she traversed between reality and darkness, Yaeko's smile still appeared from time to time.

--- I should've known that things would've turned out like this...

No one could possibly beat Miguruma Yaeko. Sometimes, even Ubuki doubted if she were human or not.

Not to mention Ubuki was the weakest among Mushitsuki, there was no way she could've win against Yaeko.

"W-What's...that?!"

"The thing that's covering the sky... Is that a swallowtail?!"

"V-Vice director!"

Ubuki heard the clamor that was going on between Inose and the white-coated figures.

"Please calm down everyone... Hehe, it's just a butterfly struggling before its death somewhere. There's nothing to worry about."

She then heard Yaeko's laughter.

The clamor instantly died down. It seemed in comparison to the abnormality that was happening, Yaeko's smile was much more fearful.

Ubuki had never seen Yaeko's shaken expression before— and it wasn't just ubuki, in fact it was possible that nobody had ever seen yaeko change her expression. This woman, who possessed a binding smile, would only show smiles and fake tears. Because she loved every single person, she believed that she was also loved by others in return.

"I-It disappeared..."

"What was that...?"

She heard voices again, but those didn't matter to her anymore.

There was no way to win against Yaeko.

Ubuki knew that better than anyone else.

That was why she wanted to use (Fuyuhotaru) at first --- to take advantage of that invincible power of hers. She didn't care even if it would result a mutual destruction or not; that didn't bother Ubuki at all. As long as she could kill Miguruma Yaeko, she didn't care what would happen to (Fuyuhotaru).

That was what she initially felt when she met Shiika.

For the sake of vengeance, it didn't matter to her who she had to sacrifice, or if she would be hated by people.

Ubuki had always been alone; the things that she was supposed to protect had already disappeared long ago. They were all deprived of by Yaeko and disappeared.

--- That was why she had never expected...

To encounter Yuu.

To become influenced by Shiika.

"...Yuu...tan..."

Ubuki slightly moved her lips upward, and smiled.

Even she herself felt ridiculous.

The tools that were prepared for revenge, actually became her irreplaceable treasures.

She actually wanted to protect her only way of revenge.

"Shii...ka...tan....."

But I just can't help it... I don't want to be like this either!

Because they waited for Ubuki.

Because they trusted Ubuki.

Ubuki was very simple-minded. Once they treated her like that, of course she would start to like them! Because she was not good at thinking, she didn't know what to do.

--- *(Sensei)... Will they remember me...?*

Ubuki asked that question in her heart.

Yet, she already knew that answer; the stupid Ubuki could only trust Yuu and Shiika right now.

--- *I've thought of the best revenge ever... praise me, (Sensei)...*

Ubuki's revenge hadn't end yet.

Even though now she could hardly move any of her body, she just couldn't stop the overwhelming laughter from showing. It was so funny that it was unbearable, so happy that would make one tear.

"Ah...Ahaha...Ahahah..."

“What’s so funny? (Karasu)”

The smiling Yaeko looked down at Ubuki.

Upon seeing Yaeko’s smile, Ubuki laughed even harder. She just couldn’t stop.

“V-Vice director!”

A white-coated figure suddenly ran to her side, and whispered something next to Yaeko’s ear.

The content of the dialogue— Ubuki heard not a single word.

But, in the next instant ---

“...!”

Yaeko’s expression changed.

Including Inose, the white-coated figures that were guarding on the side, and the person who came to report, every single one of them gazed dumbfounded at Yaeko.

The smile disappeared from Yaeko’s face. It was the first time that they had seen her shaken, all of them were staring straight at Yaeko.

At the same time, the laughter that Ubuki had been barely suppressing exploded:

“Aha --- Ahahaha!!!”

Ubuki laughed as loud as she could.

Everyone at the scene turned to look at Ubuki, surprised.

--- It worked!

--- I did it!

In her heart, Ubuki could clearly hear Yuu’s and Shiika’s shouting.

“Aha --- Ahahaha! Take that! Yuu-tan and Shiika-tan will never be caught by you! They made a promise with me after all! You’re not getting anything!”

Forgetting about the pain, forgetting about the fatigue, Ubuki opened her mouth big and wide, and laughed as hard as she could.

“You’re never gonna get anything from me anymore! Aha --- Ahahah!”

Yaeko’s gaze gradually sharpened.

According Ubuki's plan, Yuu should've safely met up with (Kakkou), right? Even for Yaeko, she couldn't possibly do any harm to Yuu under (Kakkou)'s eyes.

On the other hand, Shiika should've successfully obtained Rina's painting, and after meeting up with the (Mushibane)'s members that Ubuki had contacted, they would leave Ouka City altogether.

--- Shiika-tan, you have to keep on running! And don't ever let anyone take away your freedom from you anymore! This, is the best revenge I can ever think of!.....

That was the message that Ubuki asked (Mushibane) to deliver.

Yuu successfully delivered the CD.

Shiika safely escaped.

Ubuki had always believed in them.

The revenge plan that she had envisaged, had already worked right from the start.

"Aha --- Ahahaha! You deserved it! You can't take anything from me anymore!"

Tears then began to flow out from the laughing Ubuki's eyes.

--- I did it, (Sensei), everyone! I achieved revenge for you! Ahaha!

"....."

Yaeko showed a smile as she drew the small handgun from her inner pocket.

--- I did it, Yuu-tan, Shiika-tan! My revenge plan was a big success!

Laughing until she became hoarse, Ubuki then began to crawl desperately on the ground.

Driving her limbs that were shot by bullets, she gradually moved away from Yaeko.

"What you said was correct, (Karasu)... But, there's still something that I can take away!"

The voice was coming from behind as Ubuki continued to crawl forward bit by bit.

Right now, there was one thing remained, and that was her promise made with Yuu and Shiika.

Ubuki had to escape from here, and live.

That way, it would be their complete victory.

"(Sensei)---"

Darkness suddenly enveloped Ubuki who was crawling on the ground.

It was the same illusion as always, the same illusion that she had gotten used to already --- Since a long time ago, she knew that this was the warning that signaled when her dream was about to be completely devoured by her (Mushi).

“Do you know what *that* is... (Karasu)?”

Ubuki reached her hand into the darkness.

The hand that reached forward ---

Finally latched onto something that she wanted...

It was the gentle hand of (Sensei), who reached out to Ubuki.

--- (Sensei).....

And then, Ubuki’s hand and (Sensei)’s hand, overlapped.

--- *I won ...*

Facing the smiling Ubuki, (Sensei) smiled back.

“Farewell, my beloved child.”

A gunshot echoed.

Ubuki’s hand which was reaching forward... fell lifelessly onto the ground.

The Others

--- The CD was inserted into the goggles.

After some brief static noise and jumping lines that appeared on the lens, images and sound came.

"The third phase's testing is now over. How's (C)'s condition?"

"She's still fine."

"Good, let's enter the fourth phase just like this then. Get ready to record the experimental data of Fallen test subjects numbered 1 to 15."

"Everything is good to go."

"Start initializing voltage onto (C). (C) is slowly adjusting her pulse."

"...I-I... can't hold on... much longer..."

"We have lost response from test subject number 3, 8, and 9's brainwaves."

"Continue the experiment."

"Uh...Uuu..."

"Abnormal reactions detected! We've captured test subject number 5 and 1's memory signals!"

"(C)! Covert the signal immediately, and turn it into images! Make it fall into a loop, and insert false memory into it!"

"Uhh..."

"...No good, the signals disappeared."

"If (Fuyuhotaru) can awaken from Fallen state, there's no reason that other Mushitsuki can't... As long as (Fuyuhotaru) is still a Mushitsuki, that's enough to keep this experiment going. No... Perhaps, this might give us a result that's even better than that. --- Well, it's nice to have such results for the first time. Save the fourth phase's data into the CD.

"Start saving the data."

"Okay, today's experiment ends here."

"Yes, the above data will be saved as the Special Environmental Preservation Bureau, Central Headquarters, Koushu "Ha" sixth experiment, fourth phase's official ---"

“Warning! Test subject number 5 is going haywire! Detected brainwave signals --- Woahh!! It’s (Mushi), a cicada appeared!”

“Test subject number 1 also summoned forward (Mushi)... It’s a centipede!”

“Hurry up and save the data! (Mushi)’s elimination is prioritized first, as well as Dioresutoi’s fragments.....!”

“But...That’s still---“

Static suddenly cut in, before turning the image into a single line and disappeared.

And then, the words “Data Lost” appeared onto the lens. Once the CD passed its expiration date, the data within would automatically destroy itself.

The CD that was extracted from the goggles was then crushed, since it could no longer play for a second time.

The Others

The gunshot's echo rang throughout the entire Ouka coast park.

Miguruma Yaeko showed a weak smile.

Next to Yaeko's feet, Ubuki was lying on the ground. Behind Ubuki there was a long trail of blood, which resulted from her trying desperately to crawl away.

The bloodstained Ubuki was not moving the slightest; her face that was dirtied from blood and dirt was as pale as snow, which suggested that she had already stopped breathing.

".....That was very dangerous, you know? What if you missed? ...(Kakkou)."

Yaeko turned around. The handgun that she held in her hand was sent flying by the bullet that Daisuke shot.

"I meant to miss it right from the start."

Daisuke faced Yaeko. Behind him stood a dozen of the East Central Division members, as well as the injured Akatsuki and the East Central Division's deputy branch director Goromaru Touko who met up with them. Touko was grabbing Daisuke's long-coat, hiding behind him.

The Central Headquarters' members next to Yaeko immediately entered their combat stance.

"Oho, is that so? Where were you aiming at then?"

Facing Yaeko's question that was asked with a smile, Daisuke didn't say a word, just merely lifted his finger and tapped his temple.

Yaeko immediately changed to a different smile. Touko cried a "Hii—"sound before hiding her face behind Daisuke. Upon seeing this famous "chain of smile", every member was suppressed to a point where they would even have trouble breathing.

"It seems like your joking skill has improved eh? Did you learn it from branch director Haji? (Kakkou)."

"(Kakkou)... you! Deputy branch director Goromaru! What's the meaning of this?! How dare you open fire at vice director?!"

"Ah...Ahya!"

From behind Daisuke came Touko's high-decibel falsetto.

"W-Well... about that --- Ah, before I explain...(Nene), could you please treat (Karasu)?"

“Deputy branch director Goromaru! Our Central Headquarters’ members are not something that you can order around as you wish!”

“S-Sorry! B-But I just want to treat her injuries as soon as possible!”

In front of Touko, who was hiding behind Daisuke, a white-coated figure ran to their side. The other party immediately rushed next to the lying Ubuki, and pressed her hand on Ubuki’s neck to confirm her pulse.

And then, (Nene) opened her mouth.

Very soon, a singing sound slowly flowed into the surroundings, vibrating against the air like a ringing bell sound. At the same time, a slight glowing outline of a long-horned grasshopper appeared next to (Nene) and Ubuki. Amidst the ringing bell sound, she began to give CPR to Ubuki.

“Can you save her?”

After Daisuke asked that, (Nene) lifted her thumb up to signal no problem.

On the side, Yaeko was gazing at Touko.

“Even though it is an emergency... it indeed is our fault for entering East Central Division’s jurisdiction. But even so, I’m still surprised! Deputy branch director Goromaru, was it you that gave permission to your members to open fire at me?”

Touko poked her head out from behind Daisuke’s shoulder.

“Ah... No... That was...”

“What’s it?”

“W-Well... I clearly remembered that it’s against the rule to lynch a member... T-That’s why... Erghhh...”

“That’s why?”

“And according to the emergency order issued by the head director, there’s a change in the command system...”

“What did you say?”

It was Inose who asked that.

Yaeko stayed unmoved, keeping the smile on her face to urge Touko.

“What do you mean?”

“W-Well, I do know that I’m a bit over my head when I did this...but when I couldn’t contact vice director... I went directly to the head director for consultation.”

“Couldn’t contact? I don’t remember receiving any call from you though.”

“Eh? W-Well... But... I tried many times using the hotline. Because I didn’t get any response, I had to regard it as unable to contact...”

“..... You mean the one that called so many times, but always hanged up after one ring, and did not display Caller ID? How do you expect me call back if I don’t know the other party’s number?”

“N-Not displayed?... Eh Ah...? Ah, really?!”

“That’s just no different from a prank call! Deputy branch director Goromaru, You’re seriously...!”

While taking Inose’s scolding, Touko hurriedly put away her cell phone into her suit’s inner pocket --- Although Daisuke had heard that she was unable to contact the vice director, he never knew the truth was actually like this. Only till now did Daisuke start to feel a weird sense of uneasiness arising within.

“You said there’s a change in the command system, what do you mean by that?”

“Ah, Y-Yes! About that... it’s just the importance of the (Original Three), and the change in priority order when encountering the designated targets. I have a few ideas... In the past, we always continued with our missions even when we chance upon the (Original Three), in addition, the order issued by the Central Headquarter was processed as the highest in priority even during those times. But, at the incident before --- (Himiko)’s transportation mission, I’ve noticed this might possibly cause confusion among the members should this continue. These are ... what I’ve been thinking about...”

The smile never once left Yaeko’s face as Touko continued, but it seemed like Inose couldn’t hold on listening anymore. However, Yaeko stopped Inose from interrupting with her hand.

"That's why... I went to the Central Headquarters to acquire the head director's opinion on this... the head director adopted my idea, and just then issued the order to change the command system when encountering emergency situations. Which means --- in the event of encountering the (Original Three), the decisions made by the local division surpass the Headquarters' orders, and will executed as first in priority."

The change in command system ---

The meaning behind these words that Touko said posed great importance; It meant that, from now on, each division is free to pursue the (Original Three) within their jurisdictions. This halved the absolute power that the Central Headquarters had been upholding till now.

Inose immediately began to panic.

"How's that possible! Why would head director accept...?!"

"About that, the head director didn't actually agree with the idea at first... but after I said that it was Haji-senpai --- I mean branch director Haji's proposal, he then reconsidered."

"Did Haji-kun wake up?!"

Inose could not hide the stunned expression on his face, and even Yaeko had also put away her smile.

"Ah...No...After he woke up, he immediately lost consciousness right after."

Touko said that with a wry smile.

It was obviously a lie no matter how one looked at it.

Haji Keigo --- the man who was originally the branch director of East Central Division. Ever since he was severely injured in the battle two months ago, he had been unconscious since then. Daisuke knew that his younger sister --- Senri would always go to the hospital to see him every day.

"Ah, by the way, did you see that thing before? The giant swallowtail that covered the whole sky?! It seemed like it was summoned by (Oogui)! And it also seemed like it can manipulate a human's consciousness. That's why when I saw the vice director pointing her gun at her subordinate, I thought to myself "Ah, could it be that she was controlled by (Oogui)?"! hence I gave the order to (Kakkou)."

The truth, however, was different from what she was saying. The shooting from before was actually done on Daisuke's own free will. The reason that Touko just came up with now was actually nothing but an excuse that came to her mind.

"As you can see, I'm very normal."

"Y-Yes! It does seem that way! I'm sorry!"

"Sorry?? You're seriously..."

Because of overwhelming anger and her abnormal behavior, Inose's face became little flushed.

While on the side, Yaeko remained unmoved, just merely narrowing her eyes a bit.

"But, I'd have to say... it's..."

Putting her hands onto Daisuke's shoulders, Touko suddenly poked her head out to survey the surroundings.

"It's'? What's it? Deputy branch director Goromaru?"

"Uhm, about that... there's something that I think I should say."

"Mmm?"

"No... Uhm..."

"Goromaru-san."

"I-It'd be best if I don't say it!"

"Say it. I give you permission, no matter what you say, I will not be going after it."

"R-Really?!"

"Yes."

"Then..."

Touko then showed her usual smile.

"It's your loss this time, vice director! You have lost completely!"

Yaeko's expression twitched slightly.

Including Inose, the surrounding people were all dumbfounded. Even Daisuke was so surprised that he turned around to look at Touko. At the scene drowning in a heavy atmosphere, everyone was looking at Yaeko with horrified expressions.

Only Touko was unaware of the atmosphere that would explode at any second, and continued talking with her frivolous smile.

"Ahahah! I can't believe you got screwed up this badly by a no-rank! If only you can stop acting so high and mighty, and mobilize the "Annihilators" that you are so proud of right from the start. You thought that you can easily win this just like how it has always been in the past, but that thought actually gives you the worst outcome ever, there's nothing more deplorable than this---"

"Touko-san...I think it'll be best if you stop right now..."

Daisuke suddenly said that line. But Touko tilted her head, and gave a weak "Eh?" while looking at him with a silly expression.

With Yaeko as its center, a nerve-racking atmosphere began to spread. The pale-faced Inose slowly and quietly distanced himself away from Yaeko.

However, different from the terrifying atmosphere surrounding them, Yaeko's expression was rather calm. It seemed as if she was emphasizing that such a little thing would not move her.

"I have things to do next, please excuse me."

Showing her usual smile, Yaeko turned around. Touko hurriedly lowered her head.

"Ah... Yes, good work... Oh, another thing, (Karasu) seemed like she's still in a dangerous condition, hence we will take her under our care temporarily."

Yaeko suddenly turned around, yet her gaze was not directed at Touko.

"Have you seen the CD, (Kakkou)?"

Daisuke replied without hesitation:

"Only I have seen it."

Only Daisuke.

"That thing was created by the (Mushibane) to intentionally create confusion within the SEPB, you know that right?"

"..."

After glancing at the silent Daisuke, Yaeko gradually walked away.

Inose and the other white-coated figures had also left; only (Nene)'s singing could be heard echoing throughout the coast park.

Daisuke walked closer to the teenage girl that was lying on the ground, and moved his face closer to her.

"Hehe... I won!... it's a piece of cake~..."

Ubuki's dream talk rode along the wind before disappearing into the evening sky.

Epilogue

Girls

Akamaki City greeted a new day as usual.

No clouds could be seen in the sunny sky. However, being an urban area, the air was still hard to be regarded as “fresh”. But even so, it was still one of Akamaki City’s features.

Even though it was already late February, the temperature was still pretty low.

Walking along the sidewalk, Daisuke exhaled a cloud of white mist from the scarf covering around his mouth.

A group of primary school kids ran past him, laughing at and chasing each other. Next to him, on the side, the birch trees that lined the streets were being flooded by the crowds heading to schools and workplaces.

Daisuke raised his face, and caught sight of a teenage girl walking towards him.

It was a teenage girl, still in junior high school perhaps, with a pair of red glasses and a lovely smile on her face. Taking a closer look, a Band-Aid on could be seen her forehead. And on her wrist, where her sleeve wasn’t able to cover, bandages could also be spotted.

Before the bespectacled teenage girl walked up to Daisuke, another teenage girl rushed to her side.

“Yuu!”

“Ah, Chie-chan! Good morning.”

“Good morning? How could you greet me so peacefully after being absent for so many days! Where have you been? We were all so worried about you!”

“Well...I went on a trip of some kind...”

“A trip?! Why so suddenly...Eh? Yuu, you got new glasses?”

“Ehehe~ Can you feel the love in them?”

“Hahah? What are you talking about--- Oh, by the way, we’re going shopping after school, are you coming?”

“Sorry, but I have to go to Higano City. There’s something that I must find.”

Daisuke gave a weak smile, and walked past Yuu.

He then retrieved a small paper package from his pocket.

A card could be seen attached on the package that was wrapped in cute ribbons.

--- Dear (Kakkou)-kun: I'm sorry that I've caused you troubles every time.

Daisuke scratched his head, before putting the package back into his pocket.

Even though there was no signature or name left on the card, Daisuke knew very clear who left this in that classroom.

Daisuke also knew that, for some particular reason, the sender couldn't give this to "Kusuriya Daisuke", who should be a normal boy that had nothing to do with the battles of Mushitsuki. But deep down, he still found it a bit irritating.

"Why not to Daisuke, but to (Kakkou)...?"

Daisuke muttered a weak complaint with a wry smile.

Just then, he heard a ringtone coming from his cell phone. It was the ringtone of a popular single from the famous band, "Crawling Life", that he hadn't changed since two months ago.

"Daisuke-san, have you seen Yuu-san yet?"

After picking up the call, a familiar slack voice came from the other end of the call. Maybe it was due to the fact that it was still early in the morning, Touko's voice sounded even more absent-minded than usual.

"Yeah, she seems pretty energetic."

"Although she will be monitored by the Central Headquarters for a while, it shouldn't influence her normal life. Being able to resist the allure of (Oogui) as a normal human, she's now a rare and significant sample. If the Central Headquarters knew that as well, she surely wouldn't be handled in such a gentle way, wouldn't she?"

"That girl's battle has already ended in an all round victory. Even if some day she were to fight again, it would be a pursuit of her own."

Speaking of those words, Daisuke smiled to himself.

"According to the request on the paper note left in that classroom, possibly by (Fuyuhotaru), we've mailed Tachibana Rina-san's painting of the sunset to Yuu-san's home...But is that really alright? That painting of the sunset and the portrait of Daisuke-san... Weren't both paintings preserved in the school because Daisuke-san's own request?"

Daisuke stared at the space where Yuu was standing moments ago.

Truthfully speaking, he really felt a bit relieved back when he saw Yuu. Because he was happy that painting had finally found a deserving owner.

And he also felt relieved for Shiika.

When Daisuke heard that Shiika had escaped from the Central Headquarters' facility, he was really shocked. What had happened to Shiika? Why did she have to run away ---?

But Shiika took the portrait of Daisuke along with her. That was proof — proof that she hasn't forgotten her promise with Daisuke.

--- I too can keep on waiting, and keep on fighting.

Shiika was looking forward to the day of their reunion, just like Daisuke. As long as their feelings remained unchanged, he believed from the bottom of his heart, that day would surely come.

"Well, rather than worrying about me, is everything alright with you, Touko-san? You've made some really reckless moves this time. The aftermath should be hard to handle, right?"

"Nope! No problems at all! After all, there's no one that's more useless than me in SEPB right now...!"

"...?"

"The East Central Division is slowly recovering to its former state, little by little. Even though we've gone through a lot, we still have you (Kakkou), by our side. Plus we now have added the Kashu level two ranked (Kaguya) ---- Ogata Akatsuki-san; and the Hishu level three ranked (Himiko) --- Senri-san ,whom still has some uncertain factors to be taken care of, to our force. If there were a slightly more capable person taking the chair of branch director, there's no doubt that some people might think we have ulterior motives. That's why they allowed me to stay in such position. The Central Headquarters will also be at ease if the East Central Division were run by someone as useless as me. That's why, cheers for being useless, uselessness for the win!"

Daisuke could almost imagine Touko showing her usual good-for-nothing smile on the other end of the call, and couldn't help to burble.

Just then, Touko continued:

"About the people who have assisted Shiika-san...If, I mean if, they're (Mushibane). The situation will surely become troublesome...Do you think they're going to wage war against SEPB again?"

"As long as one remains as a Mushitsuki, they can never escape from the destiny of battle... nor can they ever give up."

Daisuke then hung up the call.

He turned his head around, just in time to hear the determined voice coming from that lovely bespectacled teenage girl.

"You know what, about today's post-graduation aspiration survey...I didn't write down Ouka East High, but filled in the High School Division of Horusu Seijyou Gakuen instead..."

Again, Daisuke smiled, before turning around.

The teenage girls' laughter gradually faded away from him.

Under the azure sky of Akamaki City, the cold February breeze kept on swaying.

Afterword

To the readers that had been waiting, I hereby apologize for making you all waited this long, and sincerely thank you for reading this book.

I'm Iwai Kyohei.

Mushi-Uta has finally reached its third volume.

As usual, the focus of this volume is centered on the new characters, and all of them are girls.

I think I've been using the same writing style for all my series till now. This, however, is not an intention of mine of trying to achieve something from writing so. After I put my thoughts into words, it naturally became like this.

The things that made me feel the most happy were the feedbacks, such as "Damn it, let xxxx show up more!" and many encouragement words regarding the writing itself, which came from the letters and postcard that I've received from the readers. Thank you very much.

I think in the following story, every character will get a chance to show up again.

But as of now, what I'm depicting are the characters that harbor many different feelings and are living elsewhere. All of them have their own stories; what I'm doing now is to make those stories intersect one and other, and enlarge it with my depiction. I think that in the same instant, there must be other story happening elsewhere at the same time.

Even you readers who are currently holding this book in your hand have your own stories, and at the same time are intertwined with many other stories. If by any chance, you were able to create a story with the people who you met on your journey, I'm sure it will be a very pleasant and wonderful experience.

In the following story, the characters might encounter, pass by, and then reunite with each other. If everybody is able to enjoy it, it will be my greatest pleasure.

--- I originally wanted to do an explanation regarding this piece, how did it become an article like this...

One more Mushi-Uta related topic.

My works are starting to serialize on "The Sneaker".

A couple of thoughts that I've had during this period are --- "Help me!", "I'm sorry.", "Go easy on me..."

... These are all the heartfelt cries that I've had while I was writing.

I'm seriously not good at writing short pieces, especially in a form of long serialization.

I cannot help but wanting to ask those people in my work field who started off around the same time as me, how can they “Pew pew pew” finish manuscripts that fast? Not to mention, while working on their long piece continuously. And also, how can they still come up with such interesting story? A half-assed man like me, just able to turn in the manuscript in time was already my limit... having said that, editors please go easier on me...

I was crying while writing manuscript you know? Even so, I still tried my best! I suddenly have this urge of wanting to write the story of Kusuriya Daisuke when he was still in his rebellious stage... (Is that all there is to the content?).

And now, the afterword is coming to an end, the following will be appreciations.

[Not that important, so skipped]

And then, to the readers who are biggest supporters of this series,

I thank you all from the bottom of my heart for willing to try this book.

I'll try my best and greet you all again, in other forms.

Feedback from the staffs:

Wing:

You know, I should've never spoiled the fact that Ubuki lived... or else that Ubuki last chapter would have shed many more tears...I really hated myself for that >.>... Anyway, setting that side, we finally finished the volume! It was a long journey just like the last two. I thank those of you who stayed with us from the start till the end (is it just me or less ppl is reading the series now? Ahah, less comments...) And of course to my editors as well, thank you for your hard works! Akios and Skat! =D

Now back to the story. From what I've read from the forums all over the Chinese community, volume 3, was one of the many few that made ppl to start liking the series. Why? You might wonder, well isn't it pretty obvious, it has a happy ending! You have no idea how this happy end makes me feel. After experiencing volume 1 and volume 2's tragedies, like most of you, I've wondered who will die this time. And just like the previous two volumes, the more I read the closer I became attached to the characters, especially Ubuki, she was my favorite character in this volume. And right from the start, she got that death flag triggered already. I'm sure no one had expected her to live through this if it weren't for the fact that I told you she lived =3=... again, hate myself for that lol... now I finally know how Akios feels ._.
(maybe I should spoil-tease him less... maybe)

Maybe to those of you that have read tons of stories might find this kind of happy ending nothing, but to most of us Mushi-Uta fans, it means a lot. Why? Because Iwai-sensei has finally moved on! He, for god's sake, finally stopped killing characters for the first time ever @A@!!! Many said that he has finally found the theme for the series, which varies from individual to individual, but in my opinion they all share one single goal, which is "Hope". In the world of Mushi-Uta, Mushitsuki must bear much more pain than those who lived in ordinary lives, all for the sake of realizing their dreams. It is very difficult to survive without hurting those around them, or getting hurt by others. But by doing so, it makes them grow, in a way. Many of them became Fallen from giving up, or simply lose to the strong one. It might sound sad, but that's how the reality works as well. Only those who that never give up, always try their best, and work hard get to realize their dream. I think that's the message that he is trying to convey, to never lose hope, don't give up your dream, and keep on fighting!

Our dreams will definitely intersect one and another someday, somewhere!

Akios: Well, I didn't get emotionally assaulted in this volume... Not horribly anyways. No one I liked died this time \o/ which is rather wonderful. Other than that, this Volume was a little, how to say it, happier than the others. It had a lighter atmosphere, and as Wing said, it condensed the idea of "Hope" as the theme. I must say, the author was mean when pulled Rina out again... I THOUGHT SHE CAME BACK TT-TT Well, I can't wait for the next volume, and I can't wait for more :d

P.S. RINAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA TT-TT

Skat: Thanks for the reading.

Special Thanks to:

Xiazailo:

Hi i'm new in the group and the epilogue is my first work. Great experience to be in the group and thanks every one for your editing! I'm still a freshman in university and I just can't figure out why my schedules are SO FULL! and haven't been able to do much for this volume. I'll try harder next time XD thanks again for the staff's guidance! Hope everyone could enjoy this volume. Iwai's getting better and better among these volumes ~